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ABSTRACT

This manual presents 99 one-sheet informational brochures designed to improve parenting skills. Each brochure is in a format suitable for duplicating, folding, and distributing. Each parenting "tactic" offers references to related brochures. Tactics are grouped under the following broad areas: (1) home/family involvement (e.g., accepting "The Other Family," education in the home, participating in the classroom, promoting family cooperation, supporting the child's needs); (2) school performance (e.g., achieving academic success, enhancing creativity, improving study skills); (3) social skills/self-esteem (e.g., building confidence, dealing with anxiety, developing self-esteem); (4) discipline/motivation (e.g., establishing routines, promoting initiative and perseverance); (5) personal health/safety (e.g., alcohol use, managing stress); (6) independent living (e.g., coping with school transitions, increasing self-reliance); and (7) bilingual/multicultural aspects (e.g., becoming a literate family, knowing one's parental rights). (DB)

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

EDITED BY
BOB ALGOZZINE &
JIM YSSELDYKE

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The *Tactics for Improving Parenting Skills* (*TIPS*) series was prepared by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke with assistance from a grant from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD), 381 Park Avenue South, Suite 1420, New York, NY 10016. The series is based on original material prepared by the editors, Saundra Deltac, Doris O'Shea, Larry O'Shea, and the staff of the Student Learning in Context Project at the University of Minnesota. Technical support was provided by Stu Horsfall, Susan Krische, and Maureen Adams at Sopris West in Longmont, Colorado. ▲

SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THIS RESOURCE

Tactics for Improving Parenting Skills (TIPS) is a series of 99 one-page informational brochures. *TIPS* was designed as a resource for families to use in improving their skills in areas related to **home and family involvement** (e.g., Education in the Home, Promoting Family Cooperation, Supporting Your Child's Needs), **school performance** (e.g., Achieving Academic Success, Enhancing Creativity, Improving Study Skills), **social skills and self-esteem** (e.g., Building Confidence, Dealing With Anxiety, Developing Self-Esteem), **discipline and motivation** (e.g., Establishing Routines, Promoting Initiative and Perseverance), **personal health and safety** (e.g., Addressing Alcohol Use, Managing Stress), **independent living** (e.g., Coping with School Transitions, Increasing Self-Reliance), and **bilingual/multicultural concerns** (e.g., Becoming a Literate Family, Knowing Your Parental Rights). While the last section focuses on tips of special interest to multicultural, multiethnic, and bilingual families, additional suggestions for these families have been included throughout the series and are cross-referenced on the back cover of each relevant tactic.

Our objective in preparing *TIPS* was to represent volumes of material in small packages that provide ideas and suggestions that can be put immediately to use. We have addressed a wide range of topics that people have told us are important to them as they face the daily challenges of parenting. We prepared *TIPS* for parents as well as for physicians, counselors, teachers, psychologists, and other professional services personnel who are charged with the task of delivering information in a quick, easy format for parents to use and understand. When deciding "what to do at home," parents often turn to these people for help and they expect, and need, quick, relatively simple, and easy to implement solutions to complex problems. Pressed to provide quick, useful information, professionals currently have few easy-to-use resources. *TIPS* provides parents and other professionals with accurate, easy to understand, practical, and self-contained information.

TIPS has been produced in a format suitable for duplication and distribution. We hope the resource will be a valuable aid for developing methods, techniques, and skills which will enhance your success and satisfaction accepting and dealing with the joys of parenting. ▲

ABOUT THE EDITORS

Bob Algozzine is a Professor of Teaching Specialties at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. He has been a teacher for all of his adult life and has numerous publications on effective teaching and various aspects of special education. He has two children, Kathryn and Michael, who help make being a parent a joyful, rewarding experience and who continually remind him that, "It's not what you do, but how you do it," that is most important. ▲

Jim Ysseldyke is Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Minnesota. A former teacher and school psychologist, Jim has published tests and written several books on effective teaching practices. He now conducts research on improving testing and teaching practices. His two daughters, Amy and Heather, have taught him how to laugh and how to be flexible. They also taught him that while no two children are alike, there are parenting tips that work. ▲

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HOME/FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

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ACCEPTING "THE OTHER FAMILY"

Parents who are divorced, or those who are single, can encourage children's interactions with other family members. Teaching children to increase sensitivity to and acceptance of a stepfamily can foster the development of trust and personal respect. When parents make a conscious attempt to recognize "the other family," they can encourage a more positive growing experience for their children. Here are some ways to help your children with acceptance.

Obtain and share information. Learn as much as possible about stepfamily situations. Seek out informal local networks, such as churches and social organizations; and formal networks, such as local schools and media for gaining stepfamily knowledge. Use public and college libraries to find books, videos, and cassettes on family sensitivity, coping with divorce, or adding new members to intact families. Learn about your children's other family. Talk about the members of the other family to the extent you are comfortable. As a safe topic, ask about the stepfamily's traditions and customs in order to foster support, understanding, and respect for your children's other family. Talk about stepsiblings', parents', and grandparents' interests and hobbies. Ask about the stepfamily's origins such as where siblings were born, what family members do to celebrate holidays, or how stepparents help with homework. Use open and positive communication with your children's best interests in mind.

Be positive. Demonstrate tolerance and be aware of minimizing value judgments on the other family's lifestyle. Be sensitive to your verbal messages, nonverbal gestures, greetings, and social phrases when speaking of the other family. As appropriate, discuss with your children the importance of the other family's religion, beliefs, biases, and worshipping practices. Compare and contrast how your family celebrates meals, family outings, or social events differently than the other family. Acknowledge positive aspects of the stepfamily's traditions and customs in order that your children or stepchildren sense acceptance and support.

Be sensitive to your child's scheduling difficulties. Plan with your children visits to the other family's home enough in advance for your children to arrange their school or extracurricular schedules. Allow your children to use the telephone and/or to accept notes from the other home to share good news. Videotape some of your family activities and make these tapes available to your children's other family. Encourage children to visit the other family often.

By **obtaining** and **sharing** information, **being supportive**, and **being sensitive**, you can help your children accept "the other family." ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material prepared by Doris O'Shea of Canon-McMillan School District, Canonsburg, Pennsylvania and Larry O'Shea of Intermediate Unit #1, Coal Center, Pennsylvania.

ACCEPTING "THE OTHER FAMILY"

SEE ALSO:

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

ADJUSTING TO SINGLE PARENTING

Single parenting means one person managing the affairs of a family without the benefit of a partner. It happens when a spouse is away for an extended period of time (e.g., in military service), when a family experiences a divorce, when parents do not marry and one parent chooses to raise children, or when a spouse dies. Single parenting is common and accepted in today's society. Single parents face many concerns that are often economic, social, emotional, and practical in nature. Here are some ways to help your children handle the effects of single parenting.

Have a financial plan. The key to managing money is living within a budget. Sit down with your children and discuss income and expenses as you arrive at a family budget. Plan shopping trips, family meals, and vacations using the elements of your budget. Encourage your children's input on how to make the financial plan work better.

Have a family plan. There are many ways for a single parent to strengthen the relationship with his/her children. Involving your children in decision making and keeping lines of communication open are vital in a strong relationship. Children often enjoy being involved in family decisions. They like to share responsibilities for decisions about housework, entertainment, and money matters. They often feel closer to the parent who asks for their advice in important decisions that affect them and others. Set aside some time each day to discuss family concerns and obtain input from your children on what is going on at school and what needs to be taken care of at home. Use this time to plan family activities and share positive experiences.

Have a personal plan. Be careful not to neglect yourself when dealing with concerns associated with single parenting. Do not ignore your own feelings and emotions. Set aside some time to do things you enjoy. Practice good health habits to help keep your energy levels high and maintain a bright outlook. Keep in touch with neighbors and friends. Spend some time with people who are close to you and occasionally ask for help as a way of strengthening relationships. Do not neglect your social life. Remember that asking for help or advice is not a sign of weakness or incompetence. Learn to recognize problems when they are small and do not hesitate to ask for help from family, friends, or outside professionals.

Have a household plan. Because most single parents must work, child care is among their areas of concern. Neighbors or paid sitters are generally accepted alternatives for infants and preschool children. Older brothers and sisters can also provide after-school care.

Whenever teenagers are left alone, have a set of rules and expectations posted and go over them periodically to help avoid problems. Divide household chores and create a job schedule to make completing them easier. Stress the importance of having all family members contribute to the success of your household plan and, whenever possible, try to make work around the house fun.

By **enacting** financial, family, personal, and household plans, you can help your children deal with concerns associated with single parenting. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material from resources prepared by Region IX Education Service Unit, Wichita Falls, TX.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

Both you and your child's teacher share a deep concern for your child's mental and physical health and education. You can encourage growth and development by working with your child's school and teachers. Get involved with

BEING INVOLVED IN THE SCHOOL

your child's education; be a part of the school's decisions, governance, and advocacy. Here are some ways to become involved in your child's school.

Be a visible partner. Today's society has magnified many problems at most schools. Being a visible and knowledgeable parent allows for greater awareness and control of the school environment. As a parent, you can support the school in its efforts to maintain discipline by matching your own attitudes toward your child's behavior, to that of the school. By taking part in the fiscal and political decision making at the local level, you can direct government toward decisions that have an effect on your child's education. Do not be a stranger to your child's classroom. Be aware of your responsibility to your child, his/her education, and your school.

Be a school player. Parents may become "school players" by participating in the many formal and informal groups and organizations that exist in support of schools. Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) offer information on community service (where to go, how to find help), social events (presentations by students), student award programs (poster contests, native language spelling bees), introductory meetings (school personnel describe their functions), and information on bilingual programs.

Parent support groups and advocacy groups exist to assure that your child is treated fairly. These groups can assist you in understanding your child's school program and practices, prepare you to communicate with teachers and administrators, and provide information on school decisions. Bilingual advocacy groups can monitor school district programs and budgets for bilingual programs and services for parents. Often your child's school, the community, local college, special agencies, and even state departments of education offer programs to educate and assist parents on ways to enhance education.

Join professional groups. There are plenty of formal organizations that exist to provide assistance to parents: The National Committee for Citizens in Education, The National School Volunteer Program, Inc., and The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The PTA has been around for almost a century providing involvement opportunities for parents to become a part of their children's education. It promotes parents as participants in education, as school supporters and volunteers, and as participants in decision making. Some PTAs provide handouts and teach methods on how to help your child. Others offer training for volunteers. Still others involve parents in decision making by asking for input on school goals, report cards, budget guidelines, and homework policies. This increased personal attention and assistance will help the school better meet your child's needs by making the educational program more flexible and thus, more child oriented.

By **being visible** in school programs, **being an active** player in school and community activities, and **joining** professional groups, you can be more involved in your child's education. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material prepared by Saundra M. Deltac of Charlotte, North Carolina.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

When parents are involved in what goes on at school, children achieve more and school experiences are generally more positive. By becoming involved, parents send a message to their child that school is important and they demonstrate

BENEFITING FROM CONFERENCES

to teachers that they are interested in their child's education.

There are many different ways parents become involved in schooling. Although there are probably as many forms of parent involvement as there are different parents, one common way that parents become involved is through participation in parent-teacher conferences. A parent-teacher conference gives parents the chance to meet teachers, ask questions, learn more about what their children are doing in school, and discover more information about school performance. Here are some ways to make parent-teacher conferences more effective.

Have a purpose for meeting. Before you go to a conference, make a list of questions that you would like to ask your child's teacher and write down any concerns about your child that you would like to discuss. If you spend some time thinking about your questions and concerns beforehand, you will be less likely to forget to ask something important. When you start the conference, tell the teacher you have some questions and would like to save some time to address these concerns. Some questions you may want to ask are: What are my child's strengths and weaknesses? What will my child be doing this year? Are there any special instructions that will help us be more successful? What can I do at home to help my child?

Be an active participant. Ask questions. Always be sure you understand what something means and that what you have heard is what has truly been said. Use the time wisely to explain and discuss.

Focus on positives. When talking about your child, try to focus on *solutions* to any problems rather than just on the problems. Identify ways you and the teacher can work together to change your child's behavior or performance, or to teach your child something new. Be positive with teachers as well; most work very hard and seldom get the respect they deserve, so recognize and reinforce the good work they are doing.

Talk to your child about the conference. Before a conference, talk about the school and ask your child about his/her concerns. Ask your child's teacher if it is appropriate to include your child in the conference. If your child does not participate in the conference, share with him/her what happened at the conference. Be positive about what you have learned by praising your child's strengths and discussing ways to improve any weaknesses.

Focus on cooperation. Establish a partnership with the teacher. Remember that you both contribute to your child's development and performance in important ways. Your child will benefit the most if you and your child's teacher work cooperatively. Working together with a teacher is the best way to get the most out of your child's education; parent-teacher conferences provide one opportunity to put this partnership into practice. Use conferences as opportunities to find ways to cooperate rather than occasions to find fault.

By **being prepared**, **actively** participating, **focusing** on positives, **sharing** information, and **focusing** on cooperation, you will make parent-teacher conferences useful, positive experiences. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material contributed as part of the Student Learning in Context Project, University of Minnesota, Jim Ysseldyke, Project Director.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

CARING FOR A FAMILY PET

Children often request a family pet by the time they reach elementary grades. Acquiring, owning, and caring for animals has been shown to aid children's sense of responsibility, reduce loneliness, promote a sense of joint family ownership, increase self-pride, and create a love of animals. In addition, sharing family pets aids many neglected animals. The way in which pet selection begins can be an important part of your children's long-term commitment to your pet's well being. Management of pet care can influence the nature of your family interactions. Here are some ways to help your children share in the responsibilities of a family pet.

Make pet choices together. Before selecting a pet, consider your children's ages, maturity levels, and their other commitments. Explain the importance of pet selection, cost, and care. Describe roles and responsibilities involved in pet ownership. Brainstorm potential chores involved in owning the family pet, such as feeding, bathing, and walking. Write a roles list before the pet purchase (e.g., assign a sibling in charge of the cat litter box or the nightly fish feeding). Talk to your children about pet care and time commitments. Teach children about the nature and needs of birds, cats, dogs, horses, or other potential pets by providing books, magazines, and videos on animal development and anticipated life changes. Talk openly on the importance of pet food selection, medical services, and necessary equipment (e.g., pet dishes, leashes, toys, or transportation boxes). Have older children research local veterinarian services and costs. You may also ask children to allocate a portion of their allowance to pet care.

Create opportunities to earn a pet. For instance, children can complete homework responsibilities, household chores, or community responsibilities in order to earn pets. Another idea is to take a large sheet of construction paper and have your child draw a picture of the anticipated pet. Divide the pet drawing into multiple sections using a thick marker (e.g., a dog could have a wagging tail section, a pair of alert ears, a wet nose, etc.). Then, children complete home chores to earn pet sections. Review completed homework, household chores, or community responsibilities. When children reach a satisfactory completion level, a new section of the desired pet is within reach. As children complete chores allow siblings to color in sections of the pet. When the entire drawing of the desired pet has been colored, help them acquire the pet from the Humane Society, an animal shelter, or from a pet store.

Turn pet care into friendly competition. Family pets often begin as a group project and end up as parents' chores. Children usually volunteer to walk the new dog, feed the kitten, or clean out the baby bird's cage. However, as the pet grows, responsibilities for pet maintenance often shift from children to parents. Parents can turn pet responsibility into family fun by creating friendly competition. For example, enter children's names with perfect pet chores completion into a drawing for a week's "release time." Once a week, draw winners who will be released from next week's pet chores. Siblings not chosen must complete the chores. Children complete pet chores in order to win release time and parents are able to distribute responsibilities in a fair manner.

By **making** pet choices together, **creating** opportunities to earn a pet, and **turning** pet care into a competitive activity, you can help your children assume the responsibilities of having a family pet. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material prepared by Doris O'Shea of Canon-McMillan School District, Canonsburg, Pennsylvania and Larry O'Shea of Intermediate Unit #1, Coal Center, Pennsylvania.

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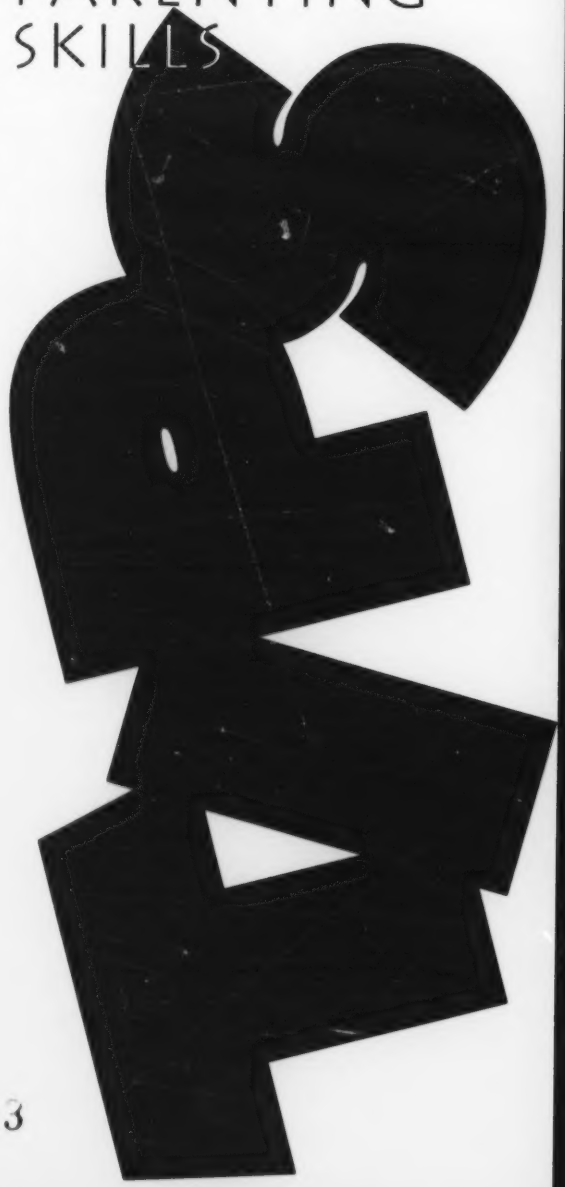

CREATING A CARING & COOPERATIVE HOME

Caring and cooperation are best taught through modeling. Becoming more caring yourself not only demonstrates the importance of such behavior to your children, it has the larger benefit of reducing stress for your whole family. Being cooperative also helps children learn that cooperation is an important and valued aspect of your life. Here are some ways to create a more caring and cooperative family environment.

Build your children's self-esteem. Listen to your children's needs and help them develop their own problem solving skills. Treat them as individuals with their own special qualities by encouraging their interests and abilities. Spend some time each day going over things each child does well.

Give some undivided attention every day. Some everyday concerns that may cause stress for children are school pressures and desires that they succeed at everything—sports, school, music, dancing, or other pursuits. Give your children a chance to talk about both happy and stressful events in their lives. Show them you understand their concerns and take them seriously.

Have weekly or regular family meetings. Give everyone a chance to speak and discuss family activities, routines, and problems. Try not to allow angry or negative attitudes to become a central part of these discussions. Focus on problem solving, rather than confrontation. If appropriate, talk about any changes or problems that are affecting your children, such as: illness, moving, divorce, unemployment, or a drug/alcohol problem with a family member. Explain how you feel about the situation, and find out how they feel as well. Try to find constructive ways to deal with changes or problems together. Examine situations that cause your family members stress and explore ways to change or avoid these situations. Seek outside assistance if a serious situation arises.

Be proactive. Try to use humor, empathy, and strategy more than anger, sarcasm, and orders when asking children to do things. For instance, if your morning routine is a source of stress, try to start your day in a less rushed way by having everyone get up 15 minutes earlier and pitch in more with morning routines. Encourage your children to plan ahead to reduce morning stress (e.g., have lunches made and clothes laid out the night before).

Make home a nice place to be. Provide a feeling of security for your children by establishing some daily routines (e.g., a relaxing evening meal together or a bedtime story). Find activities that can do done as a family (e.g., exercise regularly or participate in sports). Make sure that the activities are of real interest to your children and not only your own.

Show affection. Children need the same kind of love, patience, and understanding that you do. Remember that what is a small problem to you may be a very big problem to them. Let your children know that you love them and hug them often. Handle small problems before they become big problems for children.

By **building** self-esteem, **giving** some undivided attention, **encouraging** family meetings, **being proactive**, and **showing** affection, you can help make your home a more caring, cooperative environment. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material contributed as part of the Student Learning in Context Project, University of Minnesota, Jim Ysseldyke, Project Director.

CREATING A CARING & COOPERATIVE HOME

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

DISCOVERING NATURE

You can reinforce organizational skills, establish positive rapport with your children, and help the environment simultaneously by using a love of the great outdoors as your tool. Gardening, recycling, outdoor recreation, and spending time outside can set the stage for children's lifelong appreciation of nature. Here are some ways to help your children appreciate nature.

Use gardening to reinforce organizational skills. Gardening can be a year round family adventure that helps parents to reinforce children's planning and organizational skills. During the winter months, have your children collect flower, fruit, and vegetable catalogs so they can read about the types of planting they would like to tackle once the weather is warmer. Encourage them to use their writing skills by mailing for seeds, planting equipment, soil, and other gardening materials. Help them map out the garden before planting. Work together to dig, plant, and water. Discuss why flowers should be organized in one direction for visual or lighting effects, while fruits and vegetables can be planted on opposite sides. When sprouts appear, involve the whole family in tending the plants, collecting the produce, or organizing the distribution and cooking processes.

Model recycling to help the earth. If your community does not already have a volunteer recycling effort, arrange separate bins for newspapers, aluminum cans, and plastic bottles or containers in your home. Discuss with your children how recycling saves everyone time and money and benefits the earth. During family walks throughout the neighborhood, beach, or shopping mall, pick up trash and litter and encourage your children to do the same. Do simple conservation activities, such as walking or riding a bike rather than driving. Turn off lights, machines, engines, and equipment when not in use. Use items more than once and avoid purchasing materials that cannot be recycled (e.g., hard plastics, styrofoam, or various forms of rubber).

Play outside. Plan outdoor recreation to instill in children a love of nature. When planning family excursions, include backpacking, rock collecting, hiking, bicycling, and nature walks in the family agenda. Share nature experiences with all family members by asking your children to keep a journal on things they notice on the excursions. Help them purchase inexpensive boxes to collect rocks, sea shells, dried flowers, or tree branches for family art projects. Purchase tapes, books, videos, and cassettes on nature and spend quality indoor time using these sources with your children.

Spend time outside together. Spend time together as a family unit outside the home while helping your children to appreciate a love of their surroundings. Find the time to camp, jog, swim, or hike together as much as possible. Encourage children to write stories, poems, or songs about their feelings associated with being outside. Hold a family night where members can share written expression and plan the next outdoor excursion together.

By **using** gardening to reinforce organizational skills, **teaching** the benefits of recycling, **planning** family outdoor recreation activities, and **spending** time outside doing fun activities, you can help your children discover the wonders of nature. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material prepared by Doris O'Shea of Canon-McMillan School District, Canonsburg, Pennsylvania and Larry O'Shea of Intermediate Unit #1, Coal Center, Pennsylvania.

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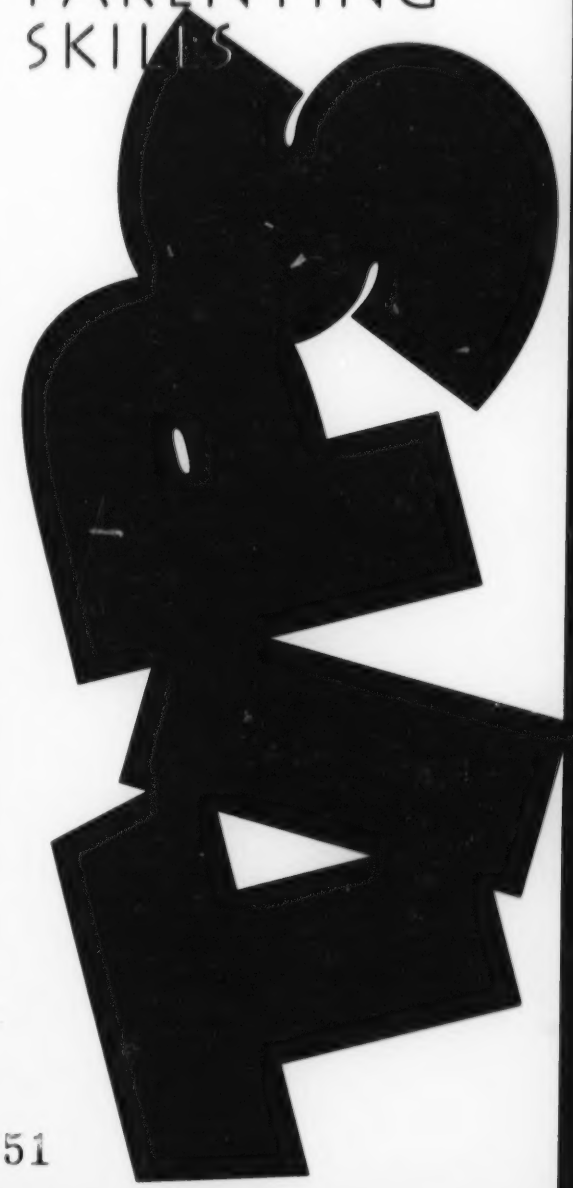

Home and family environments have a major impact on children's educational achievements. As a parent, you can make your home educationally stimulating and conducive to educational success. Here are some ways to help promote education within your home.

EDUCATION IN THE HOME

Help your children create and keep schedules. Most people are more productive if they set aside time for study, chores, work, and fun on a weekly basis. Be sure the schedules you create and monitor are flexible enough to allow tradeoffs and shifts when necessary. Make schoolwork and other learning experiences high priorities in your home schedules.

Set a good example for your children. Show your children that learning, reading, and studying are important skills they will need throughout their lives. Let them see you reading and doing quiet study work at the same time they are studying or doing after-school work. Make items available in your home that stimulate your children's interest in learning. For instance, subscribe to magazines suitable for their ages, interests, and reading skills.

Use daily activities as learning experiences. Chores as simple as finding a number in a telephone directory and sorting clothes by color for washing can help children practice important skills and reinforce what is being learned in school. More complex chores such as balancing a checkbook or making a shopping list may foster skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and using resource materials. You can also use family trips to provide valuable learning experiences for your children. Family trips, both short and long, provide a good opportunity to help your children become astute observers and share their ideas and experiences with other family members. Trips are also valuable ways to have your children practice skills such as map reading and using computation skills (e.g., computing mileage and travel time).

Monitor recreational activities. Some television programs are educational and can help your children develop vocabulary and general knowledge. Yet, too much television can be harmful because it makes children passive receivers of information, much of which is of questionable value. Encourage children to watch informative, fun programs with values you endorse, rather than shows with excessive violence or other questionable messages. Eliminate unplanned and incidental viewing to make sure your children limit their television viewing to a reasonable amount each day. Help your children develop interests, hobbies, and pastimes that can replace unplanned and incidental viewing. Choose toys and games that encourage your children to be active and creative. Word games can help build their vocabulary. Other toys and games can build your children's math and reasoning skills.

Encourage your children to share information. Set aside some time for family members to share something they have read or done in school. While you are preparing the meal, eating, or cleaning up, encourage your children to talk about school. Discuss what they are learning, any new ideas, or current events they have recently studied. Ask questions, correct mistakes, and encourage appropriate attitudes and behaviors; yet, be sure you are positive and diplomatic.

By **helping** your children create and keep schedules, **setting** good examples for appropriate behaviors, **turning** home experiences into learning experiences, **monitoring** leisure activities, **encouraging** your children to share their experiences, you can help promote education in your home. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

ESTABLISHING FAMILY IDENTITY

Parents can set the stage for group closeness by discussing family identity. Family identity evolves out of sharing experiences, opportunities, and time. Here are some ways to help all family members understand who they are, where they came from, and what will be important to future family members.

Discuss pride and loyalty. Individuals model pride and loyalty by helping children feel pride in their identity, and by openly acknowledging children's feelings on family loyalty. Parents can set the stage for healthy family identity by discussing with children ways and means to recognize pride in their home, school, and community. Have children list ten ways they are proud of their home or individual family members. Ask them to identify ten reasons they feel loyalty to their school or school personnel. Help children suggest ten reasons why being part of the community helps them become better citizens. Discussions on positive means to pride and loyalty emphasize their importance.

Acknowledge family values. Discuss with children ways to appreciate their family's values. Talk openly about family beliefs: reasons for going to your place of worship, celebrating holidays, or voting in community elections. Have children name and describe family members or community leaders demonstrating positive beliefs and values. Ask children to write stories about personal heroes in the home and community, and have them describe their heroes' positive qualities. Spend bedtime discussing why their heroes are vital, and how they help children become responsible family members and citizens.

Be consistent in words and actions. Children follow their parents actions, so it is important to consider how and why acts occur. Ask whether or not what you tell children is what **you** do. Children soon understand what their parents' beliefs and values are through observation of daily actions. If parents value patience, honesty, and reliability, they should conduct themselves in a patient, honest, and reliable fashion. Consistency between words and actions builds trust and understanding between parents and children.

Pass on traditions. Children learn important information concerning family identity when members pass on family traditions. For example, acknowledge family religious customs such as grandparents' roles during christenings, communions, or weddings. Tell children how you celebrated holidays and family get togethers when you were younger. Include children in milestone celebrations, including confirmations, bar mitzvahs, or graduations.

Bring children to family funerals and discuss the importance of family togetherness during stressful times, but aim for comfort. Help your children feel comfortable with family traditions and customs by having them identify where customs and traditions originated. Spend time discussing what your parents did to celebrate when you were a child. Keep an up to date family photo album. Label photographs with ages, activities, locations, and milestones. Identify important points in your family history, such as how you met your spouse, your first date, where you spent your honeymoon, or the first day each child came home from the hospital. Write down important events and dates in notebooks, albums, or bibles. Show children where your histories are kept.

By **discussing** concepts like pride and loyalty, **acknowledging** family values and traditions, **being consistent** in what you say and do, and **passing on** traditions, you can help your children establish a positive family identity. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material prepared by Doris O'Shea of Canon-McMillan School District, Canonsburg, Pennsylvania and Larry O'Shea of Intermediate Unit #1, Coal Center, Pennsylvania.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

FULFILLING FAMILY TASKS

Parents, siblings, grandparents, and other family members sharing a household all have important needs. Children learn responsibility when they share with other family members. Children learn how to take turns as they recognize the importance of family interdependence. Here are some ways to help your children value and respect the needs of other family members.

Assign daily chores. Ask people living in your house to share in home maintenance jobs. Ask children to clean their rooms, pick up clothes and toys, set the table, clear the dishes, or empty the trash on a daily basis. Older children can assist in babysitting tasks, meal preparations, grocery shopping, and clothing care. Rotate chores among family members. For example, "Tom washes the dishes this week and Jane dries them. Next week Tom and Jane change jobs."

Turn household tasks into weekly games. Hold a weekly drawing to pick family chores out of a hat. Siblings can pull numbers out of a hat to determine which family member will run the carpet sweeper, dust the furniture, or remove the garbage. Or, use dice or cards to bid for favorable chores (e.g., "Mary has the lowest dice total so she cleans the car. Dad has the highest dice total so he washes the dog.").

Share big jobs. By encouraging families to approach large tasks together and then showing children how individual burdens can be reduced, the time parents and children actually spend together can be improved. For example, allow children to join in the care of the family garden, the refurbishment of old porch furniture, or the upkeep of outside storm windows. Spend time with your children in shoveling sidewalks, mowing the yard, or sweeping fall leaves. Families model appropriate chore completions when everyone pitches in to reduce time consuming duties.

Use chores as quality time. Hold a family conference as everyone paints a room together. Allow children to plan a "party" around themes of cleaning the upstairs bathroom, polishing den furniture, or organizing dining room closets. Play the stereo or CD player to dance as you complete chores. Play a family room arrangement game by challenging adult-child pairs to rearrange rooms. For instance, "Mom and sister rearrange sister's bedroom; Dad and brother organize brother's bedroom." Hold a family contest to judge room arrangements on attractiveness, space, storage, and safety.

Make job chores fun. Monitor and post job performances using group activities. For example, make a brightly colored family chores chart using construction paper and post it on the kitchen refrigerator. Include all family members' names and job rules. Have each member create a magnet or marker for use on the chart rows to indicate completion of daily chores. Craft the charts and magnets around seasonal or holiday themes. Have special gifts or activities as predetermined chart marks are reached. Make group prizes (e.g., family pizza parties or ice cream trips) available when all family members complete the whole chart.

By **assigning** daily chores, **turning** household work into games, **sharing** big tasks, **using** chores as quality time, and **making** chores fun, you can turn family tasks into creative opportunities for learning responsibility and the importance of working together to meet family needs. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

GETTING TO KNOW THE ADMINISTRATION

Most parents make an effort to know their child's teachers. Maybe you met them when you were dropping your son or daughter off to school one morning. Possibly you spoke to them on the phone about planning a special event, or met them at a parent-teacher conference. But do you know who else works at your child's school? Here are some of the key people who make a school work, and who you need to familiarize yourself with if you are new to the American School System.

Principal. The principal is the person who is directly in charge and responsible for the school itself. The principal prepares school budgets, leads the staff, serves as liaison between the school district office and the school itself, and hires and evaluates teachers. Part of his/her job is to be available and accessible to parents to answer questions, to possibly conduct workshops for you, and to assist you in making the most of your child's time at school.

School Secretary. The secretary screens the principal's calls and sets up his/her meetings. In addition, the school secretary is usually the source of prompt and accurate information about the school. The secretary knows the answers to such questions as special event dates, lunch information, availability of babysitters, scheduled meetings, and transportation.

Counselor. A counselor is often a link between you and your child's teacher in meetings or discussions. Counselors track the progress of all students in the school. They will also monitor attendance and absences and keep you informed if there are any problems. Your child's counselor is someone you and your child can speak with about any concerns regarding your child's performance, parenting skills, or school activities. A counselor is an important resource to utilize at your child's school.

School Psychologist. The school psychologist tries to discover why your child may not be achieving to his/her full potential. After tests and discussions, the school psychologist, in conjunction with your child's teachers and administrators, tries to determine the best way to help your child. The psychologist holds counseling sessions, observes classrooms, administers tests, orchestrates conferences between different disciplines, and communicates between the school and the community's mental health facilities, special schools, and other doctors and resources which could help your child.

Librarian. The librarian manages the school's library. He/she teaches the children how to use the library, decides which books to order for the library, and organizes it so as to be understandable for children. The librarian sponsors contests and special reading events to get children interested in books. Librarians also read aloud to children when they can and teach students how to use the library as a resource for research. Librarians are a good source of ideas for what books would be helpful for you and your child.

Nurse. If your child gets hurt while at school the school nurse will attend to him/her. If your child requires medication, and you have signed the proper forms, the nurse will administer it at the appropriate times. The school nurse will track and monitor your child's medication. If necessary, the nurse will also make sure that your child's other teachers will be aware of the nature of his/her medical condition. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

HONORING FAMILY REQUESTS

Children learn how to be supportive when they are able to identify the needs of others within the family. At times, family members need to be alone; in other instances they need increased time together. Interaction requests vary with individual family members over time; from help with a personal problem, to an appeal for a relative's visit. Here are some ways you can help to sensitize children to family requests.

Organize family suggestions. Start a family suggestion box. Ask children to contribute suggestions on weekday or weekend activities. Locate the box on a kitchen cabinet, hall table, or other convenient location. Encourage family members to list unusual suggestions by asking for opinions and new ideas on special activities (e.g., organizing a family costume party or holding a family garage sale). Help children organize the ideas by grouping together activities with mother, father, children alone, or the family group. Have children prioritize suggestions as they consider activity costs and time involved. After family members list preferred activities, decide as a group which ones you will engage in.

Provide productive time alone. Arrange for children to experience productive time alone. For example, establish 15 minutes of nightly independent reading with all family members reading in a quiet location. At other times, paint, draw pictures, write poetry, or devise short stories together. Discuss with older children the benefits of taking a soothing bubble bath or a solo neighborhood bike ride. Encourage family members to keep diaries on the day's news, tape record reactions to school events, or just listen to headphone music as a means of enjoying independent time.

Differentiate interactions. Talk to children about the differences between productive time alone and the feelings of isolation. For instance, discuss that when people choose to be alone, positive feelings often result. However, when people prefer companionship, but no one is available, negative feelings can occur. Ask children to list and describe times and events when they feel the need to be alone. Have them list and describe times and events when they feel isolated from others. Then, have them compare and contrast their feelings between productive time alone, and isolation periods. Let them know how you feel about what they have disclosed.

Teach children to value requests of others. Ask your children to list and describe times and events when parents, stepparents, siblings, stepsiblings, grandparents, or other family members might feel the need to be alone. Ask children to list and describe times and events when others might feel isolated. Help them compare and contrast others' feelings, such as by posing: "How do you think Ruth feels when no one asks her to join in the fun?" Praise children when they come out with empathetic responses such as: "Grandfather might feel sad that he is all alone now. Let us invite him on our weekly fishing trips."; or "Jane might be overwhelmed because she just returned from time with her stepfamily . . . Let us leave her alone for a while."

By **organizing** family suggestions, **providing** time to be alone, **differentiating** interactions, and **valuing** the importance of the opinions and needs of others, you can help your children honor and appreciate family requests. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

IMPROVING HOME-SCHOOL RELATIONS

The combined influences of home and school shape the social and academic development of your child. You and your family are your child's primary role models. These models influence your child's desire to learn, achieve, and pursue a career. Feeling good about oneself and motivation are necessary conditions for learning and achieving. Parents and family members can work with the school to promote a positive self-concept in your child. Improving your relationship with the school is the first step.

Improving home-school relations can be approached with a variety of purposes. Both teachers and parents should foster a critical awareness of how important the home environment is to your child's educational success. The school's values and objectives of a formal education should be clarified to the parents. Both parents and the school should attempt to foster a wider community interest in educational values. Parents are the supporting resources for the school. Both parents and teachers should try to provide each other with instruction, information, and guidance to aid in the education of their children.

There are two main ways parents can participate in improving home-school relations. First, make increased efforts toward improving communication between you and your child's teachers and administrators. Through communication, you can learn about your child's school performances, capabilities, and interests. Second, work more often with your child at home to improve his/her educational capabilities. Reinforcing at home will also help your child acquire skills that will be useful in the classroom.

Parent-school communication can be in many forms such as notes, conferences, home visits, and joint participation in workshops and classes. Alternative forms which could be utilized include newsletters, telephone chains, bulletin boards, and recorded messages. Whenever feasible, it is important that school communications be sent in a language that parents can understand.

Helping your child become a home learner directly involves you in the education of your own child. Research reveals that parental participation in education is linked to improved academic achievement. It also allows you more contact with your child. Finally, it satisfies parents' most basic need—to help their child do better.

Helping your child in the learning process at home can be approached in many ways. You can help your child learn by establishing discipline in the form of completing daily tasks. You can model and emphasize good study habits and their importance in the acquisition of knowledge. You can monitor your child's home and school activities which are essential to your child's social and academic development.

You can participate in your child's educational process by providing instruction at home. Learning from teachers current lessons and tutoring at home helps your child be successful. Planning enrichment activities involving skills and subjects taught at school will also improve your child's performance at school. Many parents create a contract with their child to supervise their homework or provide incentives for good work. Finally, parents and family members should always attempt to model educational pursuits at home, such as reading literature, writing letters, or studying for knowledge or career advancement. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

Sibling rivalry and problems between brothers and sisters are very common in many families. You can encourage more effective interactions among siblings by addressing how and why siblings treat each other as they do. Help your children

IMPROVING SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS

recognize, value, and respect other family members by spending time discussing how and why siblings act the way they do. Recognizing the aspirations, motivations, and achievements of their brothers and sisters is an important first step in improving relations within a family. Here are some other ways to improve interactions among siblings.

Force cooperation. Invite children to collaborate and cooperate with siblings. Encourage your children to use cooperative learning ideas at home. For example, have your children play nightly card or board games with each other to encourage sharing and taking turns. Give them Popsicle sticks, old newspapers, magazines, pasta stands, paper clips, or scraps of yarn. Ask them to take turns devising the weekly family crafts project. Ask for volunteers to assist one another in cleaning the garage or bedroom, assisting in nightly dish chores, or team laundry duties. Provide rewards or special treats when siblings work together to accomplish a goal.

Support collaboration in school. Suggest that siblings help each other study. Encourage brothers and sisters to help each other with homework. Hold friendly competitive homework challenges. Encourage them to read to each other sections of the newspaper, weekly magazines, or nightly stories. Help them to devise comprehension contests on what they read or studied.

Minimize defiance. Reduce and/or eliminate sibling's resistance, withdrawal, defensiveness, and rebellion. Set up family conferences on at least a monthly basis to help siblings deal with inevitable criticisms of each other or parents. During the structured conferences, ask brothers and sisters what they can say to openly acknowledge behaviors they would like to change in their siblings, parents, or themselves. Discuss what they believe causes family rifts. Talk to your children about the necessity of each family member having separate friends, independent time, and personal space as a means to avoiding arguments. End every family conference positively by asking siblings to state a strength they note in their brother, sister, parent, and self.

By **fostering** cooperation, **supporting** collaboration, and **minimizing** defiance, you can help your children improve their relationships with each other. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material prepared by Doris O'Shea of Canon-McMillan School District, Canonsburg, Pennsylvania and Larry O'Shea of Intermediate Unit #1, Coal Center, Pennsylvania.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

INCLUDING RELATIVES IN ACTIVITIES

Relatives, especially the elderly, often have much to contribute to children and their knowledge of self and family. Parents are often the buffer between grandparents and children understanding and benefiting from one another. Here are some ways you can help children respect their elders and assist the older generation in feeling included in daily life activities.

Contact family members. Encourage children to visit grandparents and other relatives routinely. Ask children to write to and/or telephone distant elderly relatives regularly. Ask elderly family members to write to and/or telephone children regularly. Encourage children to write thank you notes when receiving family gifts by having writing paper, cards, envelopes, and stamps available.

Encourage problem solving. Organize a family trip and provide opportunities for children to be involved. For example, assign siblings the task of finding a bottle opener, a thermos, a first aid kit, a flashlight, and tissues prior to the start of a family picnic. Have them identify the importance of advance organization. Challenge children to explore potential scenarios such as: "Describe five possible endings to our picnic if we forget the bottle opener."; "Explain how we would camp if we forget the flashlight."; "What would we do if we had no first aid kit and Terry cut her arm?"

Hold frequent family reunions. Meet every few years with extended family members. Ask all family members to share in advance a favorite dinner menu, an interesting weekend, or a milestone just celebrated. Type and distribute family happenings as a reunion memento. Include your children in the planning of a family reunion. Take turns choosing restaurants or potential dessert spots. Provide children with brochures on places such as parks, camp sites, airports, ice cream locations, museums, beaches, ball parks, and other interest spots. Let members rotate decisions on the next family get together location.

Preserve family history. Preserve family history by having your children work with other family members to construct a family tree. Supply felt, buttons, materials, and yarn to construct a tree and dolls representing family members. Have children talk to elderly relatives and then write out historical family events and influences related to the family's heritage and ancestors. Have children record the details of the family tree citing names, countries, and occupations of grandparents and great grandparents.

Consider sending distant relatives monthly updates and newsletters. Homemade family albums created by children can also be used to inform grandparents of children's daily activities. Save completed homework papers, photographs, drawings, or children's short letters outlining monthly activities. Purchase a photo album to send to grandparents in which they can insert monthly mailings from your family. These monthly updates could include descriptions of cherished moments written by either adults or children. Encourage children to write short anecdotes and summaries. Relatives will receive updated and current information, and children practice reading, writing, and spelling skills.

By **maintaining** contact with family members, **encouraging** family problem solving, **holding** family reunions, and **preserving** family histories, you can help your children involve relatives in family life. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

Children are regularly asked to do chores around home and school. Generally, parents ask children to complete chores for three reasons: (1) They may use chores as a way of developing cooperative and responsible behavior in children.

INDIVIDUALIZING CHORES

(2) Children are also assigned chores because parents need their help. (3) Through chores, children are taught how to perform certain jobs around the house. Here are some ways of using chores productively with children.

Personalize household jobs. Consider your children's ages, abilities, and other commitments. Observe your children while they do new chores to make sure they understand them and have the abilities to complete them. If children complain often or are slow to complete a chore, the chore may be too difficult. On the other hand, a comment that the chore is "baby work" or "too easy" may indicate that children are ready for more advanced tasks. Parents should feel free to allow school-age children some choice of jobs. Choices may decrease complaints and refusals to do certain chores.

Give a variety of chores to boys and girls. For example, both boys and girls can help with housecleaning and yard work. By assigning a variety of chores for each sex, fairness and equality are established and skills are learned that will help both boys and girls become independent adults. Families can depend on both boys and girls to complete a variety of jobs.

Change chores as children grow older. Young children can be expected to do chores that involve taking care of themselves. As children grow older, they can be expected to complete chores that help the family and eventually significantly help reduce the family's work load.

Practice routines. Try to have chores completed by a set time each day. Generally, right before or after evening meals is a good time. A chore chart may be helpful. Place a chart in a prominent place such as the refrigerator door, a bedroom door, a bulletin board, or classroom door. On the chart, list the children's names, the chores to be completed, and space for the days of the week. Let them mark the chart when they have completed the chores for the day. Such a chart acts as a constant reminder and also encourages children to supervise and monitor their own work.

Use a chore chart and rewards as an incentive system. Rewards given consistently and **only** if a chore is completed can be useful. It is important to remember that verbal praise can also be a very effective reward. With the giving of any reward, it is important to emphasize how everyone is responsible for jobs and how the children are helping out.

Model responsible behavior. Parents who share in responsibilities without complaining or procrastinating on chores, teach children to do the same. Adults who constantly complain, rarely help, and dawdle when they do chores teach children those same behaviors. Start children with chores that are easily completed. Be patient and initially expect less than perfect work.

By **personalizing** household jobs, **developing** and **practicing** routines, and **modeling** responsible behavior, your can help your children approach chores productively. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

Talking with your child's teacher is the basis for all communication dealing with your child's education. Each teacher shares with the parents the responsibility of guiding and directing a student toward a life that is productive, balanced, and satisfying.

KNOWING YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER

Teachers seek to share knowledge, obtain feedback, and deal with both expressed and unexpressed parental concerns. Here are some ways to get to know your child's teacher.

Communicate with your child's teacher. Attend as many parent-teacher conferences as possible. Make sure there is a well publicized visitation policy which promotes a sense of partnership and pride in the school. Organize frequent school visits so you and other parents are familiar with the environment, and are comfortable with cross-communication between teachers/administrators and parents. Compile a list of school personnel who are bilingual or who share other important areas of interest with your family. Encourage your child's teachers to meet with parents to explain their classrooms and programs, and to seek their active support. Finally, never miss an informal opportunity to talk to your child's teacher. For example, bring your child to school and come for them at the end of the day, to meet, greet, and get to know your child's teacher.

Share cultural experiences. It is possible that your child's teacher is not familiar with your culture. Their behavior is based on experiences from their environment, community, and own culture. Explore the similarities and differences between the cultures allowing for an eventual better understanding of your child. Awareness of the teacher's efforts usually results in recognition of how hard he/she works in and out of the classroom for your child. Teachers also need information about your child's outside interests and health problems, such as: impaired sight or hearing, allergies to food or medicine, hobbies or sports he/she is most interested in, or what language you speak at home. This is important because it gives the teacher valuable knowledge about how to motivate your child to learn, how to protect his/her health and safety, and how to help in development.

Use conferences to gain information. Parent-teacher conferences allow you to see your child's teacher as a professional. You can also see the extent of personal concern the teacher brings to the education of your child. You can discover ways to work with the teacher to overcome problems that are not only the school's, but the community's as well. Try the teacher's suggestions about things you might do to help your child in school. When you follow the teacher's suggestion, it is important to tell him/her how you think it worked. Teachers need to know your responses firsthand and will welcome your suggestions for working productively with your child and other students. Many teachers view themselves as facilitators of learning, as people who make learning possible and knowledge accessible to students. They respect young people for their capacity to learn, and they want the help of parents to bring that learning about.

By **communicating** about school, **sharing** cultural experiences, and **using** conferences to gain information, you can get to know your child's teacher well. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material prepared by Saundra M. Deltac of Charlotte, North Carolina.

KNOWING YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

LISTENING MORE EFFECTIVELY

Healthy and productive communication within a family does not occur automatically; it is a product of many factors. Effective listening is one of the most important ingredients and the least understood. Family members listen in two ways: passively and actively. **Passive listeners** hear most of the words being said and will occasionally look at the person speaking to them. Sometimes they acknowledge what is being said, but their nonverbal behavior sends the message that they really are not interested. As if to reinforce that fact, they may repeatedly ask, "What was that again?"

Active listeners quickly establish good eye contact with their child and give verbal and nonverbal clues that demonstrate they are really following the conversation. From time to time, they check their understanding of what they have heard and engage their child in truly meaningful dialogue. Unlike passive types, the active listener can accurately report both what was said and how the child felt about it. They may also have some ideas about possible implications of the discussion for the child and themselves. Improved listening must start in the home. Here are some ways to listen more effectively to your child.

Model good listening skills. Your child imitates what he/she sees. Children tend to share things with people they think will hear them out and respect their opinion.

Take time to listen. Set aside a structured family time to let members express what is important to them, including family issues.

Choose a good setting. Although choices are not always available to us, it is best to select places to listen where distractions are at a minimum. Be sure to unplug the television and radio.

Accept feelings. Make it clear that feelings are important and that they can and should be shared in your family by both child and parents. Listen well and resist the temptation to deny or modify your child's feelings.

Monitor your nonverbal behavior. Despite the fact that it takes more effort and introspection, becoming aware of how your nonverbal behaviors are seen by your child enables you to modify your actions in ways that let him/her know that you are really interested in listening to them.

Try to be less judgmental. By being less quick to judge or moralize, parents who work on their listening skills can avoid slamming the door on the likelihood of future discussions with their child.

It takes practice to become a good listener. Children learn how to listen, or not listen, from what their parents model. Many factors influence how well family members listen to each other. People function differently at different times of the day and have different emotional levels. Our ability or willingness to listen is greatly effected by the context in which an interaction occurs. When settings are new or uncomfortable, it becomes much harder for us to concentrate on what someone is saying. It will be more difficult to listen to a conversation in a language that is not your native language. Tone of voice, facial expression, posture, eye contact, and personal appearance all provide important clues to our disposition and approachability. With knowledge and understanding of these factors and a few listening skills, you can listen more effectively to your child. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

When children change classes, schools, or programs, it can affect the entire family. Additionally, changes will occur in family routines as children age. Potential problems and adjustments may evolve when children and family members go

MAKING FAMILY TRANSITIONS

through various life stages. All family members can assist in confronting potential problems through group discussions **prior** to the onset of each change. Here are some ways to help your children adjust during family changes and transitions.

Involve the whole family. Hold a family meeting and discuss how members can make plans for anticipated changes. For instance, talk about the new morning departure and evening return times, transportation differences, or eating arrangements. Discuss roles based on these new routines. For example, parents and siblings can discuss how to share new transportation schedules, babysitting chores, home chores, or supper routines.

Talk about change. Acknowledge family stress and adjustment difficulties openly. Talk about anticipated changes in the child, parents, and other family members. Demonstrate a willingness to listen to older relatives, trusted neighbors, or siblings' suggestions for family changes. Discuss ways in which you can solve problems together.

Arouse interest in change. Point out the positive as well as negative aspects of a family transition. It is easy to focus on the negative and assume the positive features are obvious. Think about what you can do to make transitions more interesting before discussing them with your children. In addition to the aspects that you have identified, ask your children to point out what they think are the positive and negative aspects of the upcoming change.

Recognize parental coping levels and abilities. Whenever feasible, parents should not attempt to solve family problems alone. Recognize that other families in transition can help each other. Parents can seek family resources from trusted professionals, or parental coping levels may expand when parents strive for care and support from extended family members. Parents can obtain readings on family coping strategies, join family support groups, and become involved in parent organizations. Finally, enrolling in parent education and child rearing classes may help with loneliness and adjustment issues through children's development and other family transitions.

Acknowledge that change can be difficult. Family transitions are not always easy and disagreements and concerns are common during most family-oriented periods of change. Attempt to make it clear to your child that a particular family change is in their best interest. Remember when you disagree with your children about the benefits of a career or housing move, that their concerns regarding the transition are important. Often, discussion of the pros and cons provides clarification on who will be benefiting, what those benefits might be, how long before families can expect them, and where help is available during the transition. Questions from your children are appropriate and important; your concerns and needs are also important because they affect your children and family as well as community.

By **involving** the whole family, **talking** about changes, **arousing** interest in change, **recognizing** parental coping levels and abilities, and **acknowledging** that change can be difficult, you can help your children in making family transitions. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

MAKING PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES WORK

Conferences are a time when you and your child's teacher sit down together to talk about how to best maximize your child's educational opportunities. Conferences are a valuable way to develop a link with your child's school. Conferences give teachers an excellent opportunity to address your parental concerns and to answer questions about what you can do to further your child's education. Here are some ways to make parent-teacher conferences work.

Value the conference time. Start the conference right by being there on time and plan not to run over the scheduled time (usually about 40 minutes). If you cannot meet during the scheduled time, set up another time. Hire a babysitter if necessary, or find out if the school will provide child care on site. Request a translator if necessary. Stay calm and try hard to work together for the mutual purpose of your child's improved education.

Plan to share information. Your child's teacher will probably come prepared with samples of work and ideas to help your child do even better in school. You should be prepared as well. Talk to your child before the conference. Find out about favorite subjects as well as what subjects they like the least, and why. Ask your child if there is anything he/she would like you to talk to their teacher about. Be willing to discuss your child's homelife. Talk about your child's personality, problems, habits, and hobbies that you feel are important for the teacher to know. Discuss your child's reaction to homework, your home rules and responsibilities, and the type of discipline that works best at home. Be familiar with your child's textbooks and assignments.

Ask questions. Your child's teacher has a thorough knowledge of what goes on in school. There are many good questions to ask at a parent-teacher conference to find out about this aspect of your child's life. Here are some examples:

- Is my child in different groups for different subjects? Why? Is my child grouped for instruction with other students of similar abilities?
- How well does my child get along with others? Does he/she make friends easily? Does my child work well with other students?
- What are my child's best and worse subjects? How are my child's work habits?
- Does my child participate in class discussions and activities?
- What kinds of tests are being done? What do the tests tell about my child's progress? How does my child handle taking tests?

Be sure to ask the teacher for specific suggestions on ways to help your child improve. If the teacher says something you do not quite understand, do not be shy about asking for an explanation.

To help your child learn new knowledge and skills, teachers must know as much as they can about likes, dislikes, and learning styles. Conferences provide valuable opportunities for sharing this information. After the conference, start immediately on the action plan you and the teacher worked out together. Discuss the results of the conference and the plan with your child. Make sure he/she knows that you and the teacher care. Stay in regular touch with the teacher to discuss the progress your child is making.

By **valuing** conference times, **sharing** information, and **asking** questions, you can make parent-teacher conferences work. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material prepared by Saundra M. Deltac of Charlotte, North Carolina.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

MANAGING MEALTIMES

Mealtimes often result in minor battles between parents and children. Children may refuse to eat the family meal, demand other foods, or fuss and complain throughout the entire meal. Often it seems that children would rather go hungry than eat. In reality, children would rather feel powerful than eat. Children receive a great deal of negative attention from mealtime power struggles. Often, the children "win" out when the parent gives in to their wishes or allows inappropriate behaviors to occur. Here are some ways to help your family survive mealtime routines.

Focus attention on appropriate behaviors. When the desired behavior occurs, you should identify the appropriate behavior and praise your children for doing it. For instance, "I like the way you are sitting in your chair and using your silverware correctly," instead of "Sit up straight, use your fork correctly." Try to catch your children "being good" at mealtimes and acknowledge good behavior with praise and recognition.

Respect individual opinions. Respect rights to dislike different foods or to be less hungry at times. If your children want to eat only one type of food, such as hot dogs, talk about having hot dogs for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snack, until your children decide that they might like to eat other foods. Make realistic demands on children. Often, conflict arises when the child refuses to eat certain foods. Parents must remember that it is impossible to force children to eat. When parents try to force their children to eat, a power struggle will surely result. Offer children choices during meals. For example, "I'd like you to eat four bites, you can choose what you want the bites to be of."

Communicate expectations clearly. When consequences are explained to children, expect children to "test" whether parents will enforce these consequences. Remember to stick to your expectations and consequences. Explain consequences for inappropriate behavior before the meal. For instance, "If you complain about your food, then your food will be taken away until you are ready to eat it without fussing." If your children refuse to sit on their chairs, explain that the chairs will be taken away and they will have to stand through the meal. If children refuse to stay at the table to eat, explain that if they get up to leave, the food will be taken away as if it was finished and nothing will be available to eat later.

To avoid conflict, try to make a preferred food contingent upon demonstrating appropriate mealtime behavior. Try to end meals with a positive consequence such as a special food or activity. For instance, a rule might be that children receive dessert only if they finish a less preferred food. Keep in mind the long-term goals that you have for your children and realize that changing behavior takes time.

By **focusing** attention on appropriate behavior, **making** realistic demands, **respecting** individual rights, and **communicating** realistic expectations, you can help your family survive and even enjoy mealtime. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

MONITORING TV TIME

Children spend as much as 30 hours a week watching television. By the time they graduate from high school, many have spent 12,000 hours with the school and 18,000 hours with TV. While television may have positive influences on children, there is abundant evidence that too much television has a negative impact on children.

Studies have demonstrated that watching violence on television can increase children's aggressive behavior. As a parent, you play an important role in enhancing the positive impact and diminishing the negative impact of television on your child. Here are some ways to help your child monitor time spent watching television.

Eliminate unplanned viewing. Spontaneously turning on the TV and spinning the channel selector, rather than consulting a guide, usually indicates a lack of other activities. Help your children develop interests, hobbies, and pastimes that can replace TV viewing. You might help your children start a collection of shells, stamps, or rocks. You can encourage them to play games that require them to be active and creative.

Spend some time reading and discussing weekly TV listings with your children. You can then work together to make a schedule of shows you will watch during the week. This helps eliminate unplanned and incidental television viewing and lets you monitor the shows your children watch. It also helps strengthen reading and communication skills, and fosters mutual understanding between you and your children.

Focus television viewing. Do not let your children watch TV while they are doing other activities. Watching TV while doing other activities may teach a subtle habit of not fully attending to anything. For instance, a superficial and disinterested approach to education may develop if children are allowed to watch TV while doing homework. Structure television viewing. VCRs may be used to provide greater control over the quality and type of programming available to meet the schedule of your family.

Analyze television programs. Discuss the messages conveyed by TV programs with your children. A list of standard message questions, ethical principles, or value statements is helpful in the discussion. Which character are you most like? Do you think policemen really live like the ones on TV? Was Rambo justified in killing all those people? Where do the characters who never seem to work get all their money? Such discussion helps parents to recognize areas where children are learning wrong or undesirable beliefs, values, and behaviors. It also provides a chance for parents to reverse any such negative impacts on their children.

Encourage your child to watch programs that require attention and that teach prosocial lessons. You can view programs such as "Nova," "Wild America," "Newton's Apple," and "Wonder Works" with your children. Praise them for careful attention to fairly complicated material. You can also work to improve the nature of television for children. Action for Children's Television is a citizen's action group with the mission to improve the quality of programming for children. ACT's address is 20 University Road, Cambridge, MA 02138.

By **eliminating** unplanned viewing, **focusing** television viewing, and **analyzing** television programs, you can help your children get the most out of time spent watching TV. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material contributed as part of the Student Learning in Context Project, University of Minnesota, Jim Ysseldyke, Project Director.

MONITORING TV TIME

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

PARTICIPATING IN THE CLASSROOM

Parents and teachers share a commitment to a common good: improving the lives of the student and the child. Both parent and child as well as teacher and student share a learning relationship. You are your children's first teacher and your continued support and skills are still necessary once a child goes off to school. The experiences from your home and culture affect your child's values, patterns of language use, and how he/she interacts with other children. These are important aspects of your life that can be shared with your child's classroom friends and teachers. Here are some ways to participate in your child's classroom and obtain many benefits for you, the teacher, and your child.

Be a classroom helper. You can help by planning parties or special events. You can establish a telephone communication link with other classroom parents. You can assist on field trips, or help in other parts of the school where adult supervision is required, such as the cafeteria, library, and playground. Helping in the classroom allows the teacher to have more time with the students and allows the parent closer contact with the teacher, making that relationship more comfortable. It also allows parents to see how other kids act and sends a message to the child that his/her parent is interested in what is going on in the classroom. By helping in your child's classroom, you do not have to depend on conferences alone to know how your child is doing emotionally, socially, or intellectually.

Be a classroom aide. Classroom aides do a variety of work. They often grade papers, help children with makeup work, or provide an ear to listen to a slow reader practice. Aides often help prepare classroom teaching materials. Sometimes they help develop curriculum materials or plan a lesson about a child's native culture. Many language minority parents have begun a new career beginning as a teacher's aide in bilingual programs. Eventually, they pursue coursework to be certified and formally join the system as educators. Being a regular volunteer in your child's classroom offers many benefits.

Share cultural expertise. If you cannot be a consistent part of your child's classroom, invest in the school system in some unique manner. If you are from a multicultural family, or new to America, you may be especially helpful. For instance, teach the class about your cultural holidays and plan a celebration of that day within your child's class. Share your cultural beliefs and traditions with the class. Bring in photographs and regalia from your country to illustrate to the class what your culture is like. Share and discuss what being a child and going to school was like in your native country. Teach them some native songs.

Share your expertise. Would your child's classroom be interested in knowing what you do for a living? Explain to them what you do. If you play an instrument, instruct them. Build something that they can use within the classroom.

By **helping** in your child's class, **sharing** your cultural experiences, and **sharing** your professionals skills, you can become a more effective classroom partner. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material prepared by Saundra M. Deltac of Charlotte, North Carolina.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

PROMOTING FAMILY COOPERATION

Cooperation means planning, deciding, taking turns, solving problems, and sharing. Cooperation brings many families closer together. You can promote cooperation in daily family activities and provide children with opportunities to feel good about participating together in friendly situations. Here are some ways to promote cooperation in your family.

Organize cooperative meal planning. Have siblings plan school lunches together for the following week. Have them take turns in preparing and serving holiday or birthday dinners for family members. Offer weekly challenges in which family members work together to invent new ways to prepare basic meals. Interest sibling teams in concocting new recipes with hamburger meat or fresh vegetables. Ask older children to assist younger brothers and sisters in creating unusual cookie recipes using ingredients such as cereal, rice, fruit, or cheese.

Challenge creativity. Invite siblings to choose a menu around foods beginning with a certain alphabet letter. Ask brothers to plan "theme" meals (e.g., "Only smooth foods like soup and pudding tonight."; or "For lunch plan yellow foods, but think green for supper!"). Challenge father and sisters to devise original meals with cheese and fruits. Hold a family contest to make tomorrow's appetizers out of today's leftovers. Or, have father plan with daughters a special lunch made exclusively from the family garden. Mother can work with sons on devising ten variations to peanut butter sandwiches.

Turn household activities into problem-solving tasks. Have children plan and purchase a meal cooperatively. Give each child a set sum of money based on your weekly food budget. Allot children one to two items to purchase individually. Encourage grocery selections falling within the budget. After the meal selection and purchase, ask siblings to cook, serve, and clean up from the meal without parental assistance. For additional variation, serve meals in a different fashion. Creative meal servings could include unusual napkin designs or place mat servings. Playing simple serving games encourages children's playfulness, ability with directions, and cooperation. Ask young children to color paper plates or to decorate a paper tablecloth. See whether or not family members can serve foods without using family dishes. Ask family members to serve vegetables differently (e.g., "Mom and Grandfather modify beans; Dad and Grandmother tackle applesauce."). Devise a market treasure hunt around serving themes (e.g., "Serve soup differently using an item from aisle five."; or "Look for an original ice cream server in aisle 11.").

Plan cooperative events. Set a weekly or monthly priority for preparing a favorite family dish with each child. Invite a friend to your home to share in the meal. Have your children practice meal preparation steps and write notes about the meal so they can teach others. Plan activities in which relatives or friends teach children games or card tricks they played as children.

By **organizing** and **supporting** collaborative group activities, **challenging** creativity, **turning** routine activities into problem-solving opportunities and games, and **planning** cooperative events, you can foster family cooperation. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material prepared by Doris O'Shea of Canon-McMillan School District, Canonsburg, Pennsylvania and Larry O'Shea of Intermediate Unit #1, Coal Center, Pennsylvania.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

RECOGNIZING LIFE'S REALITIES

Parents can support facing life's burdens and tasks by helping their children realize everyday realities. Preparing children for responsibilities inside and outside the home may help. Parents can help children become aware of and help other family members face challenges, but the process begins with information. Here are some ways to help your children face up to family realities.

Share family burdens. As children mature and age, they can begin to face family realities. Help older children understand parent responsibilities by explaining your job requirements. Ask children to brainstorm ideas on helping parents relax when they come home from work. Plan some quiet time before beginning an important family activity. Include older children in family budget issues. Ask for children's input on sources to save money, reduce family workloads, or make weekends less hectic.

Communicate with children. Discuss sources of parent stress with older children. For example, discuss your feelings when babysitters are not available for parents' night out. Ask younger children to explain reasons why **they** believe the family cannot buy new toys right now, and what they can do to help. Have children list how all members can sacrifice to buy needed family groceries, use hand-me-down clothing, or recycle dishes and furniture. Providing information on parental expectations and feelings often helps children understand the basis of life's realities early on.

Play problem-solving games. Parents can model problem-solving techniques through game playing. For example, ask family members to generate a list of dangerous situations that children would like to avoid. These might include what to do to avoid strangers, drugs, or unpleasant school experiences. Tell family members to explore phrases exemplifying touchy situations and potential solutions. Cooperatively develop simple games based on suggestions. Parents and children might further discuss ways and means to "Just say no to drugs," or "Avoid strangers offering candy," when these puzzle solutions are solved in the family's "Wheel of Fortune" game, or other similar formats.

Seek support from the extended family. Recognize times when children's care is more than parents can handle. Discuss the financial, emotional, and medical impact of your children with grandparents and trusted neighbors. Talk with family members when you feel rage, anger, or frustration with your children. Seek family support to handle unbearable child-rearing stress, such as daycare when your child is sick and you must work. Ask for relief from other family members when coping strategies are unavailable, such as assistance in managing children's temper tantrums, or guidance with legal troubles. Ask family members to offer financial support and time commitments in times of intense need. For example, ask an aunt and uncle to share babysitting duties of toddlers or children with disabilities. Ask grandparents to contact professionals for information on local child abuse resources, services, and programs. Model for children how family supports work in times of intense isolation and loneliness.

By **sharing** family burdens, **communicating** with children, **playing** problem-solving games, and **seeking** extended family support, you can help your children with the realities of family life. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material prepared by Doris O'Shea of Canon-McMillan School District, Canonsburg, Pennsylvania and Larry O'Shea of Intermediate Unit #1, Coal Center, Pennsylvania.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

STAYING INVOLVED IN SCHOOL

Children greatly benefit when parents take an active role in what goes on in school. However, many parents find it difficult to get involved in their child's education. Some believe they will be bothering teachers; yet, most teachers welcome the added information and insight that parents provide. Some believe that teachers are the experts and that parent opinions are not useful; yet, usually parents have information that makes teaching easier. Some parents are uncomfortable meeting with teachers; yet, most teachers welcome the opportunity to work with parents and go out of their way to make the experience rewarding. Here are some ways to become involved in your child's education and help them succeed in school.

Know your child's teachers. The simplest way to become involved is to attend school functions designed to introduce you to teachers and demonstrate what your child is learning. Scheduling convenient conferences between you and your child's teacher also helps in learning about daily activities and expectations. Write down questions and topics before meeting with your child's teacher and be sure to ask your child if there is anything he/she wants you to discuss with his/her teacher. Over the course of the school year, try to stay in touch with your child's teacher(s). Brief notes or phone calls on special occasions can help to make the school year more positive.

Take part in school activities. Ask your child's teacher how you can be involved in school activities. Many parents enjoy doing volunteer work in their child's school and most schools enthusiastically welcome assistance from parents. Help is needed in the school library, cafeteria, on field trips, or in after-school programs. Others take part in fundraising events. Let your child's teacher know you are interested in helping at school. Make a list for the school of your special talents or specific areas in which you believe you can be the most helpful.

Make your home a learning place. Help your child make the most of after-school time. Set aside a work time for the whole family to use to accomplish quiet activities (e.g., independent reading, studying, completing homework). Set aside some space in your home for a study center where everything needed for successful completion of homework can be found. Review your child's homework assignments before they are returned to school. Try to view the work as a process, not just as a finished product. Have a variety of reading material around your house. Also, ask teachers for books at appropriate reading levels and read them together. Also, ask for some books on improving study habits.

By **getting to know** your child's teachers, **participating** in school activities, and **making** your home a learning place, you can be a partner in your child's education and help him/her approach school with a more positive attitude. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material from resources prepared by Region IX Education Service Unit, Wichita Falls, TX.

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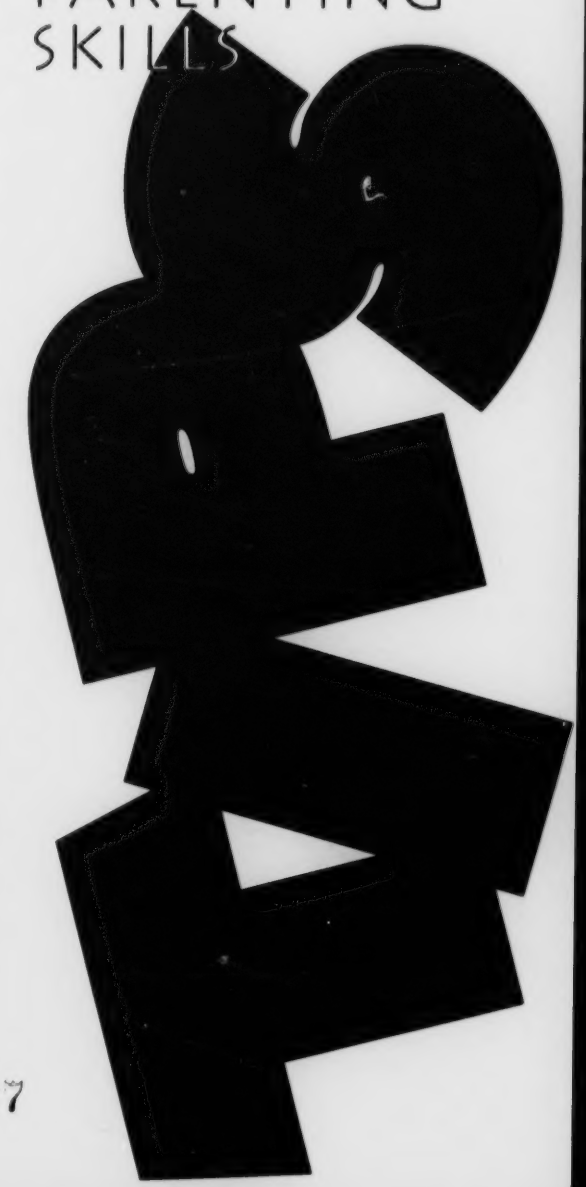

STRENGTHENING FAMILY UNITY

Spending time with your children promotes a sense of family togetherness. Quality interactions can be increased when family members make efforts to be together. Planning family events and spending weeknights or weekends together often create lifetime bonds. Here are some ways to increase family togetherness.

Make a family bulletin board. Encourage togetherness by posting family news and important family notices on a home bulletin board. Use cardboard, a paper carton covered with material, or cork to make the bulletin board. Or, choose to buy a ready made bulletin board from a local hardware store. Alert all family members to check the home bulletin board daily for family updates, telephone calls, or last minute changes in schedules. Use pictures in place of words for young family members.

Give opportunities to express ideas. In addition to suggesting new things to do, encourage children to list new ways to participate in regular family activities. For example, challenge children to consider how family members can work together to earn extra money for the weekly movie, art supplies for family projects, or monthly parties. Interest children in outlining a new family theme, such as "outdoor activity during winter holidays" or "indoor fun during summer vacation."

Take learning trips. Trips that are both fun and educational could include: a family overnight hike, an outdoor barbecue, a camping trip, a family treasure hunt at the beach, or time spent stargazing, or watching and explaining electrical storms together. Plan get away weekends such that father and son indulge in a weekend shopping trip while mother and daughter plan a sledding excursion, and then reverse partners the next time. Encourage children to mark a calendar to keep track of what family activity will take place when. Be sure to spend plenty of time discussing upcoming and past trips together.

Limit commercial consumption. Hold a volunteer grab bag during holidays. For example, around Thanksgiving, set a gift price limit for members wishing to volunteer in a Christmas gift exchange. Secretly pick names by drawing from a hat, then decide on a date for mailing and receiving. Send unique gifts purchased from flea markets or garage sales. Encourage children to exchange homemade gifts or gifts from the heart, in lieu of store bought gifts. Encourage family members to hold a "Free Flea Market" in which they exchange favorite books or other used items such as jewelry, homemade pottery, favorite soup or salad recipes, creative family photo albums, original stories, or poetry.

Use the seasons to teach children about family friendships, and the fun and happiness of keeping families close throughout the year. In the winter, arrange family trips around seasonal sports such as a toboggan party, ice skating trip, or a snowshoe walk. Organize summer trips to the beach, camping weekends, hikes, mud fun races, or family picnics. Before the trip's conclusion, discuss how and why family members feel happy together and close.

By **making** a family bulletin board, **providing** opportunities to express ideas, **taking** learning trips, and **limiting** commercial consumption, you can increase family togetherness and encourage a positive family outlook. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material prepared by Doris O'Shea of Canon-McMillan School District, Canonsburg, Pennsylvania and Larry O'Shea of Intermediate Unit #1, Coal Center, Pennsylvania.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS

Raising children can be the most rewarding and most difficult aspect of your life. Making sure children understand and follows simple rules, teaching social skills, dealing with frustrations, and encouraging independence are just a few of the ways parents are expected to help their children. Being a good role model and having open lines of communication are vital in effective parenting. By discussing experiences and feelings, describing why family decisions are made, and listening to both sides of family disagreements, you can help your children adjust to the structures and demands of parenting. Here are some other ways to help yourself with parenting.

Support your child's physical needs. Safety, shelter, good nutrition, sleep, exercise, and medical care are important physical needs of children. Using seat belts, teaching home safety rules, and "kid-proofing" your house help you meet your child's needs for a safe environment. Keeping a comfortable home as well as being concerned about clothing and the weather are part of meeting shelter needs. Encouraging your children to eat three good meals a day that incorporate the four food groups is part of meeting their nutritional needs. A good night's rest and daily exercise are also important in supporting good physical health. Take your children for regular visits to their physician to monitor health and obtain advice on ways to support their growth and development.

Support your child's emotional needs. Love, acceptance, security, and praise are important emotional needs of children. Let your children feel your love by how you hold, touch, and smile at them. Telling your children of your love is good, but showing is better. Accept your children's accomplishments and try not to dwell on failures. Avoid using threats to security to control your child. Be positive when making decisions about discipline; look for opportunities to praise rather than punish. Kind words and gestures go a long way in helping to support your children's emotional needs. When praising children, focus on their ability and effort as sources for positive performance. Look for opportunities to say something positive to children each day and help them practice making positive comments about others.

Support your child's intellectual needs. Talk to your children about what is going on in your world. Try not to burden them with problems, but do not be afraid to share positive and negative aspects of your work and social life. Encourage your children to ask questions and be sure to provide honest answers; ask for help when tough questions come up. Become involved in your children's school; ask teachers to describe what is being taught and how you can provide support at home. If you do not understand a homework assignment, ask for help. Look for opportunities to support school assignments with family trips and outside activities. Encourage your children to be creative at home and point out opportunities to share creative experiences back at school. Ask your children's teachers to supply a list of learning aids (e.g., calculators, globes, resource and reference materials) that you can use to assist them with school assignments at home.

By **supporting** your children's physical, emotional, and intellectual needs, you can help yourself make parenting a more positive experience. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material from resources prepared by Region IX Education Service Unit, Wichita Falls, TX.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Academic success depends a great deal on the effort exerted. Teaching your child the importance of this simple fact is not easy, but the confidence he/she will gain from it will help tremendously in the future. Here are some ways to help your child achieve success with improved effort.

ACHIEVING ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Recognize, value, and reward effort. Let your child know that effort is an important factor in achieving any goal. Praise your child for trying, not always just for achieving. For example, simple support from comments like, "Look how hard Michael is trying," or "Good job, Mary, you are certainly working hard," can be very helpful. Discuss the pleasures and pains of hard work and effort with your child. Discuss your work with them; tell them about the aspects you enjoy and the things you find difficult about it. Describe the satisfaction you get after a tough day, after working hard to achieve a job well done.

Acknowledge task difficulty. Sometimes you can provide encouragement simply by recognizing the difficulty level of a problem. Comments like, "Wow, that is a tough problem, keep at it," you will encourage your child and provide that extra push needed for success. While acknowledging the task's difficulty is important, task completion is the ultimate goal. Teach your child that every job that is started needs to be finished (small jobs done are better than large jobs undone).

Emphasize effort more than ability. Effort can change whereas ability is considered less alterable. Children who stick with a task longer and more persistently take more responsibility for the outcomes of their behavior, and tend to attribute their successes and failures to effort rather than ability. Avoid phrases stressing ability, such as, "You are so smart," or "It takes talent to do that." Instead, try to use the words **effort** and **hard work** in your praise. Say, "Good effort," "Nice work," and "Thanks for trying so hard."

Learn from mistakes. Teach your child that there is nothing wrong with making mistakes as long as we learn from them. Turn failure into a learning experience. Explain the benefits of **trying** to your child. Then, brainstorm ways to do better, and ways to work harder to succeed next time.

Provide feedback about performance. Check your child's work frequently, and be specific in any feedback you provide. Tell him/her what has been done well, then work together to correct any mistakes. Make sure your child understands what he/she is doing right or wrong. Not only does this help children get their work done correctly, it makes them aware of their efforts, what they have done well, and what they can improve upon in the future. It shows that parents know they are working hard and care enough to help them work even harder. It models for children that final products get better by working hard and putting in more effort.

By **recognizing** and **rewarding** effort, **acknowledging** the difficulty of some tasks, **emphasizing** effort more than ability, **turning** mistakes into learning opportunities, and **providing** feedback, you will help your child achieve greater success in school and other life experiences. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material contributed as part of the Student Learning in Context Project, University of Minnesota, Jim Ysseldyke, Project Director.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

BECOMING AN AVID READER

Often, parents wonder if there is a correct way to turn their children into good readers. It seems as if no other skill is as important to school success as reading, and, therefore, it is the one about which parents are most concerned. Clearly, good readers read often. Here are some ways to help your children get into the habit of reading.

Let your children read what they enjoy. Particularly in the early years, let your children choose what they want to read themselves and offer no criticism, advice, or suggestions to read "better" material. As a result, the motivation to learn new words and better understand what they are reading will come from **them**. They will not be learning to read to please you, but to please themselves, which is a crucial first step to becoming self-reliant readers. Children will love reading when it is allowed to be their own thing.

Keep parent and teacher roles separate. Sometimes when parents experience reading problems with their children, it is because there is confusion with teacher-parent roles. Your role as a parent should not be confused with a teacher's role. You should expect teachers to assign reading homework for the purpose of introducing children to a variety of topics and genres. Children may not experience the same joy and feeling of ownership when they do these assignments as when the are reading on their own. However, if your children understand this, reading skills will be strengthened and a sense of pride will develop because they have completed their work.

Reading success happens when parents expose their children to all types of content and allow them to choose what to read to themselves. Introduce them to others who might recommend the perfect book. Oversee children's reading homework assignments to ensure that they are completed accurately and within given timeliness. It is the teacher's role to introduce children to literature genres, classics or what is defined as good literature, as well as to teach comprehension, phonics, and study skills.

Praise your children's reading progress. Some children learn to read more quickly than others. Children need opportunities and encouragement as they learn to be good readers. Encourage children to keep on reading even when it is difficult. Help them with difficult words or passages.

Monitor school performance. Offer to help with homework. Even if children have no assigned homework, they can benefit from a few minutes of reading time each day for learning activities. Using homework time to practice reading is an easy way to keep track of progress your child is making in reading.

Limit television viewing to make time for reading. Generally, less TV watching frees up time that can be used for reading. Reading teaches children to actually use their imagination, while television presents all the answers.

Use the local library. Encourage participation in library activities and book clubs. Have personal library cards in your children's names. Take regular trips to the library to check out new books.

By **encouraging** free reading, **keeping** roles separate, **praising** reading progress, **monitoring** reading performance, **limiting** TV watching, and **using** the library, you can help your children become avid readers. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material contributed as part of the Student Learning in Context Project, University of Minnesota, Jim Ysseldyke, Project Director.

BECOMING AN AVID READER

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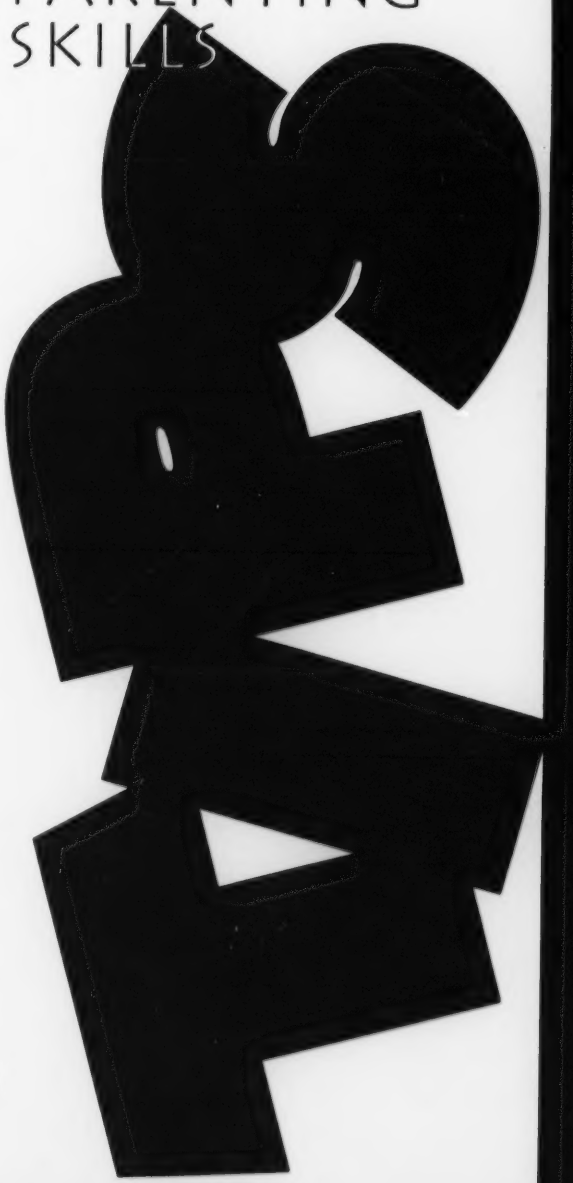
TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS



BEGINNING TO READ

Countless articles have been written about the need for reading to your child, providing a quiet reading time, and modeling a positive attitude toward reading. These do influence reading achievement. However, when you ask individuals just what turned them on to reading, the answer is invariably one special book, series, or author that provided pleasure, solace, and company. Whether it is comic books or classics, sports magazines or baby-sitter club books, fantasy or realistic fiction, there is a special book or magazine for each child.

Often, children find these special books with the help of others who share and understand their interests and feelings. These book matchmakers can be parents, but are sometimes older siblings, other relatives, librarians, teachers, and, most important, peers. Good teachers know the importance of peer book recommendations, especially from second grade and up.

The secret to making your child a good reader is finding just the right material that will keep him/her coming back for more. Here are some ways to help your child with reading.

Read aloud to your child. Children who were read aloud to from an early age tend to be better readers. Not only does this activity improve listening, verbal, and written skills; it fosters a love of books, builds vocabulary, and helps children gain basic understandings about the reading process (e.g., print is from left to right, books have a top and bottom.) Although letting your child choose what he/she wishes to read to himself/herself is important, you can also use your read-aloud time to introduce your child to books you loved as a child, or those you would particularly like him/her to become familiar with.

Use wordless picture books for imaginative reading. "Read" wordless picture books to your child by explaining what is happening on each page as you proceed through the story. When your child asks for a favorite book and you have "read" several times, ask **him/her** to tell **you** a story about the pictures. Record some of the stories and write each sentence or thought for your child to read. Read each one together until your child feels comfortable enough to read them alone.

Use reading to acquire knowledge. Reading helps us acquire information. Taking a child into the community will give him/her a strong foundation to draw from when reading. Take your child to sports events, parades, museums, the zoo, plays, and concerts. Talking about these experiences will help your child better understand his/her reading, while enhancing vocabulary.

Use life experiences as a resource while reading. Ask your child about the day's events at the supper table. Encourage him/her to discuss, describe, and reflect on what he/she has experienced during the day. Have your child compare storybook characters and events to those in his/her own lives.

Monitor reading support. Each stage of your child's reading development will require a different sort of support from you. For example, a young child will benefit from you reading to them, while an older child needs opportunities to practice reading to you. In addition, as a child becomes a better reader, he/she may enjoy reading to himself/herself or others.

By **reading** aloud to your child, **using** varied materials, **using** reading to obtain information, **using** life experiences as resources, and **monitoring** the reading support being provided, you can help your child become a better reader. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

With increased television viewing and the rapidly growing number of home computers, exchanges among family members are on the decline. Conversations, discussions, games, including word games, have become less common and, in some families, nonexistent.

DEVELOPING LANGUAGE SKILLS

In order for children to develop language skills and achieve in the area of language arts, parents must promote an interest in words and how they are used. Here are some old and new games you can play to encourage acquisition of vocabulary and rules of grammar.

"Mad Libs." A favorite of children ages seven and above, "Mad Libs" comes in a tablet format and is sold in book stores, usually in the games section. One child takes on the role of narrator and asks others to supply designated parts of speech which are needed to complete a story, nonfiction article, or monologue. Once all the words are supplied, the narrator reads the hilarious result to everyone's enjoyment.

"Mad Libs" have been around for a long time, but still provide great entertainment. Not only do they inspire children to go looking for new and different adjectives, adverbs, nouns, and verbs, they also help students remember their parts of speech. In addition, as stories are created, children are then able to practice reading.

"Fictionary." "Fictionary" is a fun word game that is a must for older children (third grade and above). It is most successful with a mix of adults and children, so it is a perfect family game. The person who is the leader finds a word in the dictionary and reads it using the pronunciation key. Each player writes on a file card or small piece of paper (make the pieces uniform) a definition which he/she makes up to fit the word. No one knows what part of speech the word is so definitions will vary widely. However, the more knowledge they have about parts of words (e.g., prefixes, suffixes), the more accurately they may define the word or guess the correct definition.

As players are concocting and writing down their definitions, the leader copies down the first dictionary definition of the word on his/her card. Then, all cards are collected, shuffled, and arranged in a stack by the leader. No one sees anyone else's definitions and the leader then reads aloud each definition once. The definitions are read a second time as players vote on the one they believe is the real definition. As they vote, the leader writes each player's name on the card with the definition he/she chose. When all definitions have been read and votes taken, the leader reads the correct definition and awards points.

Each player who guessed the correct definition earns one point. Players earn two points each time another player votes for his/her definition. The leader earns one for every player who does not vote for the correct definition. Players keeps track of their own points. At the end of each round play passes to the left and a new player becomes the leader. At the end of the round, points are tallied and a winner is declared. That person can start round two as the leader. (*Sniglets*, by Rich Hall, is a commercial version similar to "Fictionary.")

Playing games at home can help your children master key skills associated with language arts. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material contributed as part of the Student Learning in Context Project, University of Minnesota, Jim Ysseldyke, Project Director.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

DISCOVERING THE LIBRARY

Your community library is an available resource which offers an endless array of information, activities, and materials to enhance not only your childrens' learning, but your own. Librarians are always on hand to help you select books for yourself and your children. They can offer you highly illustrative books where little reading ability is required. Many libraries also provide personnel who are able to locate books in your native language. Librarians are on-site advisors who aid parents, like yourself, who are seeking books, video tapes, and audio cassettes which are appropriate for you and your family's interests. The librarian can recommend read-along books with accompanying records.

Besides the librarian, the library offers a variety of other resources that your children should be taught how to use. Have the librarian give you and your children a tour of the library. Learn where the reference books are located and demonstrate to your children how to look up answers. Utilize encyclopedias, dictionaries, and almanacs. Learn to use the computer to search for books. Know where the children's section is and check for information on story hours and other activity times.

Ask the library staff if you can have some of their old magazines. Make a pictionary with your children using cut out pictures from the magazines which illustrate the words. Paste different parts of the body, cut from old magazines, to create a collage of a person. Label the parts and learn the names of each.

Make sure your children have their own library cards. Teach your children the responsibility of having a card and of caring for the checked out books. Attend library programs sponsored for children. Libraries often offer special children's story hours around key holidays. Additionally, the library may offer adult language classes and other educational and cultural classes that may be of interest to your family.

Allow the librarian to direct you to some multicultural literature. There are many books written in English about other cultures; these books of interest are referred to as "multicultural." Culturally conscious literature accurately reflects the culture, language, history, and values of the subject country. Multicultural literature offers the same advantages as any other fine works of literature. Selecting books from your own cultural heritage allows for:

- Enjoying a good story.
- Gaining insights on the human condition.
- Acquiring new vocabulary.
- Feeling pride in one's own identity and heritage.
- Validating one's own cultural experience and perspective.
- Recognizing the members of one's own cultural group that are published authors.
- Discovering that one's own experiences can be found in literature.

Not only culturally diverse students learn from multiethnic literature, all students can learn:

- About American society's diversity and complexity.
- To develop an appreciation of and insight into other cultural groups.
- To recognize that American society is composed of many different cultural groups.
- To gain a more in depth and accurate view of other cultural groups.

Finally, when children read multicultural literature they can gain a more balanced view of history and the forces that shaped American society. Children can learn about the contributions that **all** cultural groups make to our society. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material prepared by Saundra M. Deltac of Charlotte, North Carolina.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

ENHANCING CREATIVITY

Creativity involves bringing original ideas into being. It is the interpretation and manifestation of the imagination. It includes flexible thinking and the ability to produce unusual ideas or products. A rich environment, along with the freedom to explore and experience, will encourage children's creativity and promote their interest in the world around them. Giving your children the freedom to be different and the opportunity to do unusual things, can enhance their creativity and originality. Here are some other ways to promote creativity.

Be a role model. Express an active interest and enthusiasm for new and unusual ways of doing things, and uncommon ideas. Encourage your children to reach out to experiences and activities which interest them. Let your children experiment and explore in the world around them. Support these experiences in an open-minded way. Listen to your children's creative ideas without being judgmental or critical. Allow them to learn from and expand upon these experiences with your support and confidence. Your children are aware of and sensitive to how you react to their ideas, so make sure to encourage creativity consistently. Praise your children for their success and support them after failure.

Encourage creating and producing. Encourage your children to color, draw, paint, and write from an early age. Provide simple arts and crafts materials with which they can use their imaginations. Encourage older children to keep a journal of their ideas and experiences. Allow some TV and video watching. Educational programs provide a wealth of knowledge to enhance your children's imagination. However, too much TV can have negative effects on school achievement and creativity. Use television viewing as a point of discussion. Encourage your children to question facts and ideas before accepting them. When discussing ideas, facts, and events with children, encourage them to guess and to follow their instincts and feelings. Encourage them to take risks by expressing their ideas.

Play creative games with your children. When you are with your children, play creative games with objects around the house. When walking or driving down the street, play observation games. Encourage story telling; try word games and drawing games. Invent new rules for old board games. Do not dismiss your children's unusual ideas as unrealistic, useless, inappropriate, or wrong. Children will learn to expand their minds and enhance creativity by trying new things and developing new and unusual ideas.

Allow your children personal time. Children can use personal time to read about things that interest them, be creative, or to just have time when they are the boss. Do not demand production excessively.

Read to your children. Reading stimulates the imagination by providing a wealth of knowledge and information. Reading to your children will stimulate their desire to read on their own. Ask children to write a different ending for the story. Encourage children to write and illustrate their own stories. Expose your children to creative people's lives; these creative people can be role models and a means of support for your children when they feel different or alone.

By **modeling** creative behavior, **encouraging** creative behavior, **playing** creative games, and **reading** to your children, you can foster creativity. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

IMPROVING STUDY SKILLS

Successful studying takes time and effort. It requires learning some basic skills if it is to be a productive activity. Children must understand the importance of spending time on schoolwork outside of the classroom. This fact cannot be emphasized enough! Good study skills can make learning easier and significantly improve school performance. When studying leads to achievement, it becomes a rewarding experience for children. Here are some ways to help your children improve their study skills.

Model and support studying. Many parents find it helpful to read or study when their children are studying. Parents find that having a scheduled family study time eliminates many hassles and conflicts about homework completion. Reinforce your children for studying periodically. Praise your children for working hard and urge them to "Keep up the good work."

Provide a productive work area that includes good lighting, a desk or table to work on, and as few distractions as possible. Radios and TVs should be turned off when children are studying. Help your children study for tests. You can make up practice test questions as a study aid. After they answer them, you can help them to identify areas where more studying is needed.

Establish goals and objectives. Teach your children to set and prioritize goals. Setting specific goals makes it more likely that tasks will be completed in a timely manner. Children should learn to set realistic goals so they do not become frustrated. Realistic goals are possible if your children do not put off doing long assignments and studying for tests until the last minute. Spreading these tasks over several study periods will make studying less stressful. Learning to set priorities will help children manage their time more effectively. It is a good idea to make a list of all assignments and number them in order of their importance. It may help your children to write out the days of the week and write each assignment next to its due date.

Teach studying behaviors. Encourage your children to do the more difficult assignments first. Children are most likely to feel energetic and alert at the beginning of a study period. Assignments that take less concentration should come after the hardest tasks are completed.

Teach your children to be active readers. When reading or studying a chapter in a textbook, children should use a survey-read-survey approach. This entails first surveying the chapter for main ideas as indicated by titles, introductions, paragraph headings, and summaries. Reviewing a chapter after reading it through increases the likelihood that material will be understood and retained. Encourage and help your children to use dictionaries and encyclopedias.

Encourage your children to use several methods for studying. Memorizing new information is easier if a combination of tactics are used. For instance, you might try reading aloud the information, while your children are busy writing it down and saying it to themselves.

Value independence and personal style. Allow your children to develop their own style of studying. Once they have learned basic skills, they will probably find that some approaches work better than others. At this point, you can gradually decrease your involvement until your children are able to take full responsibility for their own study habits.

By **modeling** study skills, **valuing** goals and objectives, **teaching** study skills, and **valuing** individuality, you can help your children develop and improve study skills. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material contributed as part of the Student Learning in Context Project, University of Minnesota, Jim Ysseldyke, Project Director.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

INTERPRETING REPORT CARDS

Report cards provide children with valuable feedback that will help them learn and measure their academic achievements, but they are not without problems: Children being labeled early as poor students; grades becoming the ends in themselves; threats about grades creating children with a fear of failure; grades given but unexplained so that parents and children are left to wonder what they mean and why they were given; grades creating unrealistic expectations regardless of ability or the difficulty of the material; and grades being viewed as an all powerful and accurate measure of children's abilities.

Too often, parents rarely question why teachers grade as they do. They accept a low grade and may even think less of their children as a result. These inaccurate beliefs may result in even poorer grades, low self-esteem, and a damaged parent-child relationship.

Regardless, report cards are here to stay and can be used in ways that will promote communication between parents and teachers, indicate school problems, and serve as reminders for parents and children to reassess how things are really going. Here are some ways to make report cards more useful and improve your understanding of them.

Monitor progress frequently. Be in contact with your children's teachers more often than just when the report cards are due. Ask for indications of problems that may be evident on upcoming report cards. Use the report card as a reminder of the need to communicate with teachers about your children's progress.

Keep report cards in their place. Make sure you and your children remember that the report card is only one measure of what was learned, **not** an evaluation of each child as a human being. Getting a 'C' does not mean that child is less of a person than someone who receives an 'A.' Children need to know that they are loved and accepted no matter what grades they receive.

Value effort as well as outcome. Try to figure out what has gone into the grade. Ask your children what they have learned. If the grade is not good, ask each child: "What would you do differently?" or "How can you improve?" Make rewards given for performance contingent on **behavior** instead of **grades** (e.g., handing in homework versus getting an 'A'). Too often, report card grades are far removed from behaviors that you may wish to reward.

Expect performance, not just perfection. Treat low grades or failures as a sign of a problem that can be helped. Concentrate on what could be done to change the grade and try not to view the current grade as a total disaster. Remember that report card grades reflect a mixture of each child's progress, subject material difficulty, the child's motivation or ability, the teacher's beliefs about grading, and the teacher's perceptions of each child's progress.

By **maintaining** contact with teachers, **keeping** a realistic viewpoint about grades, **valuing** effort as well as outcome, and **keeping** performance as a primary goal, you will be better able to understand your children's report cards. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

KEEPING GRADES IN PERSPECTIVE

Whether we like them or not, school grades are a part of children's lives. They offer information about performance in school and reflect the personal standards of the teacher who assigns them, as well as specific school policies. Grades generally provide an indication of mastery of skills and knowledge, improvement, or effort, as well as a ranking of performance relative to other students.

Some parents consider grades to be the most important form of feedback about school performance, while others are more interested in teacher comments and checklists. Some parents believe grades promote a possibly unhealthy competitive learning environment at school, while others believe that when grades are used, their children become too dependent on teacher approval and tend to lose their personal initiative and creativity.

Encourage your children to do their best in school while also understanding that the experience amounts to more than just the final grades. Here are some ways to help keep your children's grades in the proper perspective.

Stress grades only as much as necessary. Establish realistic expectations for your childrens' grades, but try not to be overly dependent on grades as evidence of success. Speak to teachers about what expectations are appropriate for your children. Ask your children's teachers where their academic strengths lie and where there is room for improvement.

Help your children develop good study habits and the ability to work independently in an organized way. Try to promote a sense of responsibility toward work. Encourage your children to think about their performance and the personal satisfaction they derive from it. Remember to praise your children for their effort as well as what has been completed well.

Use monetary rewards cautiously. Rewards, such as money or toys, linked to grades often take away from the personal internal satisfaction your children may have after trying their best. External rewards may reduce their personal satisfaction attained after a job well done.

Stress progress not just performance. Pay attention to your children's progress in school. Read your children's report cards and regularly discuss their progress with teachers. Discuss report cards with the teacher if you do not understand the grades or comments made.

Accept fluctuations in grades. Your children will not always perform perfectly at school. Children naturally go through a series of changes while growing up that effect their performance in school. School performance may reflect what is currently happening in your child's life. Pay attention to a sudden pattern of lower grades and consult with the school staff. You should also consider other aspects of your children's life for answers. Respond to serious grade problems by trying to identify the possible causes. Attempt to find the possible causes of low grades and work to improve them, rather than punishing your children or blaming the school.

By not **stressing** them more than necessary, **using** rewards for them cautiously, **paying attention** to progress not just performance, and **accepting** fluctuations in grades, you can help your children keep grades in the proper perspective. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

LEARNING THROUGH MUSIC

Music is important in the education of children. It is one of the true accomplishments of the human race and one of your children's richest heritages. All cultures share a love and appreciation of music and each culture has offered a unique contribution to the music of the world. For this reason all good schools provide a program of music education. Children benefit from a strong musical education in many ways. Music can:

- Be a disciplined emotional outlet.
- Enlarge potential for creating and enjoying beauty.
- Develop skills and understanding needed for using music in free time.
- Introduce other cultures.
- Unite your children with culturally diverse groups of peers to share the rewards of music.
- Build the aesthetic and spiritual values that are important in the overall development of both personality and character.
- Enrich your children's lives for years to come.

The study of music should begin during the years spent in elementary school. These are the years during which children are acquiring attitudes, skills, and appreciations in many fields. Music is for all children, not just the talented. You and your school should help your child create a relationship with music that will bring lasting satisfaction. Your children should have a continuity in music from grade to grade so that musical growth may parallel physical and emotional development. A combination of a strong elementary music program and a musical home should include:

- A daily music period with either a competent music teacher or exposure to music at home.
- Time to sing, play, create, and listen to music.
- Experiences that develop functional familiarity with musical notation.
- Opportunity to play and experiment with instruments.
- Experience that develops familiarity with a keyboard.
- Exposure to culturally diverse types of music.
- Opportunity to play in a band or play an orchestral instrument.
- Opportunity to sing in a choral ensemble (choir).
- Rhythmic movement (dance).
- Participation in the presentation of musical programs.

Children who receive a sound musical foundation can later study the art more in depth. All students should have some significant musical experience as part of their general education. Much of the progress of music education has been due to parental interest. Such interest is most helpful when it is concerned with the real educational objectives of school music. Make music an important part of your home through modeling behavior that you want your children to value. Developing a good musical atmosphere in the home helps the child find some relationship between music studied at school and the music heard at home. Music is often used with ESL students; songs, rhymes, and jazz chants are used because music accompanying choral singing is less intimidating that straight recitation. Music is a relaxing force for children of all languages.

Parents should ask themselves if they use music adequately in their home. Do you expose your children to different types of music? Do you sing songs with your children? Have you taught your children songs in your native language? Does the school music program adequately measure up? Communicate with your school's professional music educators and find out what you can do to enhance your children's musical education. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material prepared by Saundra M. Deltac of Charlotte, North Carolina.

LEARNING THROUGH MUSIC

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

MASTERING MATH

Math is a blend of reason and memorization. To help your child become a mathematical thinker, introduce activities and initiate discussions which not only lead to understanding and clarification of math concepts, but also strengthen computational and problem-solving skills. Here are some ways to help your child learn math.

Practice math readiness activities. Encourage interest in numbers and mathematics by counting and playing simple games using addition and subtraction. For example, have your child count the number of words in a favorite song, or count the number of keys on the piano (black vs. white), or find sums or differences for common things around the house.

Practice math everyday. Informally talk about time and dates. Discuss values of coins and let your child help shop or play store. To help your child estimate, count, and see practical uses for math, ask how many marbles (or pennies, jellybeans) it would take to fill a jar or how much time passes between daily events. Talk to your child's teacher about how to reinforce and help your child practice the things taught in school. Teachers often have ideas on home activities that can reinforce lessons learned in the classroom.

Practice basic math skills. Help your child understand the steps involved in solving a math problem. When a mistake is made, ask your child to "think aloud" by describing step-by-step how they solved the problem. Many times your child will recognize and correct mistakes when going back over the problem on his/her own. Make practice of basic math skills (e.g., addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, decimals) fun by trying the following activities:

- Hide flashcards so that your child must hunt for each card and shout the answer as they run to find the next card. As he/she becomes quicker at finding the cards and shouting facts, set a time limit.
- Paint or draw a large square with nine sections. Number the sections randomly from one to nine. Have your child throw two beanbags at the diagram and then add, subtract, or multiply the numbers depending on the process you want to practice.
- Have your child say 30 facts into a tape recorder. Your child will say a fact (e.g. 16 - 9 =) wait three seconds, tap a glass with a spoon, and say the answer. When your child rewinds and replays the tape, it becomes an automatic self-correcting math fact practice tape. You can use math quizzes your child brings home that were completed in school. Ask your child's teacher how many facts your child should be answering in a given time period. As you child becomes quicker at answering the taped math facts, make another tape in which answers are given after only one or two seconds.

Relate math skills to life. Help your child apply math skills learned in school to real life problems such, as family budgets, grocery bills, phone bills, estimating costs, and planning trips. Praise correct and completed work. Be generous with praise for correct answers and finished work, for this helps build self-confidence.

By **practicing** readiness activities, **practicing** basic skills frequently, and **relating** math to real life experiences, you can help your child perform better in math. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material contributed as part of the Student Learning in Context Project, University of Minnesota, Jim Ysseldyke, Project Director.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

When parents want to help their children in school, many simply do not know what they should do or how to do it. More often than not, this causes parents to focus on the wrong aspects of schooling. Concerns about grades and

STRENGTHENING REASONING SKILLS

right or wrong answers, not developing thinking or reasoning skills of their children, become central concerns. It is generally better to emphasize thinking more than knowing the right answer. Here are some ways to go about it.

Challenge children to support their thinking. As early as possible, encourage children to defend their answers. Encourage them not to be satisfied with factual answers only; tell them to verbalize the reasoning for their answers. By questioning the answers children provide in ways that challenge them to stand by what they have offered, we encourage our children to think. For many families, this becomes a game that parents and children play while riding to school or having a casual meal.

Give them things to think about. Parents and children should talk about what they see and hear while on family trips or daily activities. Encourage and challenge children to come up with different ways to view the world as a result of what they have seen. For example, after a trip to a natural history museum or after viewing a television show about dinosaurs, parents and children can discuss what the world might be like if extinct animals came back.

Involve the whole family. Everyone in the family should be encouraged to become involved in developing a thinking curriculum at home. Even the youngest child should be encouraged to contribute to discussions. When there are no right and wrong answers, every bit of information is important and everyone's opinion matters.

Tell it like it is. Precise use of language is an important skill for all ages; it prevents misunderstandings and helps sharpen ideas. Games using language are valuable in this regard. For example, in "I Spy," a player starts by describing something in a vague, but accurate way (e.g., "I see something red.") Others try to guess what it is as more descriptive clues are added. In "Tell Me More," a brief description is expanded at the request of players who try to be the first to identify a hidden object. In "ICUC" (I see, you see), one child is blindfolded and asked to identify the picture described by another player who provides three sentences to describe one of two similar pictures from a magazine or book.

Play word games. A coma is a deep sleep, chirps are bird's words, a runway is a plane lane, acrophobia is height fright, an ape is a chunky monkey, a beacon is a bright light, and a lighthouse is a night light. Can you think of others?

By **challenging** children to support their reasoning, **giving** them things to think about, **involving** other family members, **using** precise language, and **making** learning fun, you can develop thinking skills. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material contributed as part of the Student Learning in Context Project, University of Minnesota, Jim Ysseldyke, Project Director.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

SUPPORTING INCLUSION

Inclusion means providing experiences for a child with a disability that are provided for neighbors and peers. It is a component of reform and restructuring efforts in most school districts derived from key principles made clear in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990: Children with disabilities must be educated, to the maximum extent possible, with children who do not have disabilities (e.g., their natural neighbors and peers). While the law does not specify how this should happen, schools across the country are including more and more students with disabilities in regular education programs. Here are some other ways to help your child with inclusion.

Use collaborative problem solving. Special education personnel are available to help you devise a plan for including your child in the regular education program. These same people can help devise solutions to problems that might occur during the inclusion process. Frequently meet with your child's regular teacher and other school personnel to monitor progress being made and devise solutions to problems as soon as they arise. Being vigilant early on goes a long way in making inclusion work.

Obtain direct classroom assistance. Special education personnel should be available to provide direct assistance to your child in the same classroom as a neighbor's child or your child's peers. The assistance can range from providing individualized support with specific lessons to delivering instruction to small groups of children or the whole class.

The special education teacher can illustrate ways to modify instruction to better meet your child's needs and teach special content related to disabilities or other areas of interest. Co-teaching/collaborative teaching arrangements provide ample opportunities for your child to be included in regular educational programs.

Seek consultative assistance. Special education personnel should also be available to provide indirect services to your child by working with regular teachers on a consulting basis. Working together as a team, your child's regular teacher and a special education teacher can plan modifications needed to successfully include your child in the regular education program. They can also discuss adaptations and accommodations needed to make materials, instructional methods, and tests more accessible. Consulting teachers can also provide instruction on learning strategies, social skills, or other areas that will help your child be successful in the same classrooms as your neighbor's child or your child's natural peers.

Resource room support. Special education teachers should be available to provide assistance in resource rooms to enhance your child's skills to be successful in the regular program. Your child should receive as much instruction as possible in the regular classroom and report to the special education teacher for reinforcement or extension of what is being learned as well as special instruction as appropriate to meet individual learning needs. Ideally, this help should be provided in the regular classroom, but practicing learning strategies, test-taking skills, and other skills in a small group environment can often make transitions easier.

By **using** collaborative problem solving, **obtaining** direct assistance, **seeking** consultative assistance, and **using** resource rooms wisely, you can help your child with inclusion. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

TUTORING AT HOME

You can supplement school activities by following through on a teacher's request to assist your child in class assignments and homework. Tutoring is a volunteer activity on parents' part and works best when parents and teachers have open communication about the appropriate time, content, and amount of materials to be targeted. Here are some ways you can supplement, but not be overwhelmed by tutoring your child at home.

Plan regular tutoring nights. Help your child by arranging a scheduled study night to supplement classroom tasks. Ask for specific assignments from the teacher. Assignments should be those he/she has already been taught, not new work requiring the parent to take the teacher's place. With all homework or materials, tutors should start by initially reviewing the directions, and gradually allowing the child to complete the work independently. As a tutor you should always assist your child in checking finished assignments and providing positive feedback on whether or not answers are correct. Check work frequently to avoid having your child practice errors as a result of a faulty process or general misunderstanding. Find a quiet location and be sure distractions are kept to a minimum.

Turn tutoring exercises into games. When teachers ask you to spend quality tutoring time on tasks of your own choosing, you can make tutoring fun by using common household items in game formats. Make home reading, mathematics, language, and science fun. For example, use the radio station, television shows, or current CDs to assist in language and computation skills. Be creative by using "home junk" as learning materials. For example, ask your child to use paper clips for solving multiplication problems; use old shoe boxes or egg cartons to steer your child's science project.

Point out the value of reading, writing, and arithmetic in daily tasks. Whenever possible, link home and school activities. For example, discuss how science and mathematics are the basis of cooking, health maintenance, or exercise. Guide your child to read the newspaper or weekly magazines to understand current events. Keep track of a local sports team's progress over the season. Challenge home writing projects for your child to acquire catalog items, cartoon time, or commercial requests.

Encourage your child's study and research skills. Help your child to outline homework and use study maps. If possible, buy a home computer. Ask the teacher to lend or, if possible, you can purchase taped texts, electronic note takers, and a variety of electronic editing and communication formats that help ease children's academic tasks. Encourage your child with grammar, syntax, or spelling difficulties through the use of handheld spelling checkers, the dictionary and thesaurus, as well as word processing computer programs. All these can aid in overcoming writing difficulties.

By **scheduling** regular tutoring hours, **turning** tutoring activities into games, **valuing** school subjects, and **supporting** research and writing skills, you can tutor your child at home. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

USING LANGUAGE TO LEARN

Words, used in reading, writing, speaking and listening, are the keys that unlock the world of learning. If children have difficulty with language, none of the other subjects will come easily. Mastery of a language requires practice. Thus, it is very important for parents to listen to, help, and encourage children in language development. Here are some ways to help your children use language better.

Value reading. Reading is a means of gaining information and a source of pleasure as we see words unfold into stories, images, and ideas. Encourage your children to read books, magazines, newspapers, comic books, or any other reading material. Be a good role model—let your children see you reading. Read to your children and ask them to read to you. Even junior high school students benefit when listening to adults or other children reading. When children read aloud, they develop speaking and language skills as well as reading skills.

Value writing. Write notes to your children with instructions, requests, and information. Expect them to take phone messages, leave notes to family members, write letters, and perhaps keep a diary or journal.

Act as an audience for your children's writing. When your children have a writing assignment, listen as they talk about their ideas. Ask questions and discuss the topic, sharing what you know about it and suggest some places where more information might be found: textbooks, library books, reference books, magazines, and newspapers.

Expect longer writing assignments to go through several drafts. Lend an eye, or even better, an ear to first drafts. Read and listen for understanding of ideas and logical thinking, without demanding perfection. Ask questions about any ideas that are not clearly expressed and compliment parts that are well written. Then read the final draft for clarity and neatness.

Value conversation. Create opportunities for your children to practice vocabulary, grammar, answer questions, and express their ideas within conversations. Generate questions dealing with rituals, relations, history, and other family information. Have children discuss valued family experiences to personalize their conversations. Language interactions can also help your children develop active listening skills. These listening skills can be improved through conversation, reading aloud, and discussing the content and ideas of radio, television, movies, and plays.

Play word games. For instance, provide a set of clues for a specific word and have your children come up with the word. Or take a common word (restaurant) and have them generate as many other words as possible using the letters in the first word (rest, start, rant, east, restart). Or make up a list of sentences that can be interpreted differently depending on how they are said (e.g., "You're going?"; "Let's talk turkey."; "It's too hot to eat."). Or put together a set of idiomatic phrases (e.g., let the cat out of the bag) and discuss their literal meanings as well as often used translations.

By **valuing** reading, **valuing** writing, **creating** opportunities for conversation, and **playing** word games, you can help your children become more proficient with language. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

WORKING WITH THE SCHOOL

Schools promote parental involvement because they believe it is important in your child's education. Creating a team and making teamwork a primary goal are keys to making your child's education more successful. Parents who are involved in their child's education are demonstrating the importance of working together with the school to promote educational success.

Characteristics and benefits of an effective team include individuals with a wide range of competencies and skills working together, supporting the importance and acceptance of individual differences, fostering cooperation rather than competition to achieve unified goals, and supporting the concept that a **whole** education is more than the simple sum of its parts. Here are some ways to help make your child's education better.

Provide opportunities for practice. Read to your child; listen to them read. Help with homework and provide a quiet place for after-school work. Structure your child's after-school time. Limit access to television. Do everything you can to support what goes on in school and provide opportunities for your child to practice the skills being learned each day.

Talk about school. Ask your child questions about school on a regular basis. Encourage your child to tell you of any problems at school, but do not expect it to happen without some prompting and reminding.

Talk with school personnel. Establish regular communications with your child's teacher(s). Respect teachers' schedules and always ask when it is an appropriate time to reach them. Request information from the teacher(s) on their class (course content, rules, expectations, and requirements) so that you can help reinforce what your child is learning in school. Practice school rules at home and let your child's teacher(s) know that you are doing so.

Ask for periodic progress reports. These reports will be particularly beneficial if you are providing special support at home. Tell the teacher(s) about any situation at home which may have an impact on your child's behavior, attitude, or performance. Contact the teacher(s) or the principal immediately if you think your child's needs are not being met, but respect the professional preparation of your child's teacher(s).

Provide help at school. Offer to help as an aide, resource person, or helper in your child's classroom. Attend parent-teacher conferences and open houses at the school. You can also schedule a visit to the classroom, talk to the principal, and ask for a tour of the school.

Let the principal know what a fine job your child's teacher is doing and congratulate the principal on a job well done. Familiarize yourself with the school's rules and regulations. Encourage your child to participate in school activities. Attend cultural and sports activities with your child. Get a calendar of school activities and plan to be involved. Get together with other parents and organize an activity (a dinner, an exhibition, etc.) for the school community. Offer to organize a school activity for an ethnic holiday. Form or get involved in a parent group. Do everything you can to support what goes on in school and provide opportunities for your child to know of your interest and support.

By **increasing** opportunities for your child to practice what is being learned at school, **talking** about school, **talking** to school, and **providing** help at school, you can help to make your child's education a better experience. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

Writing is a key part of many school experiences. Like most other academic skills, writing improves with practice and instruction. Here are some ways to help your children with their writing skills.

WRITING WELL

Help your children observe. When there is an appropriate opportunity, such as when you are reading, sitting the doctor's office, or eating in a restaurant, describe what you see to your children. In your observation, mention body language, social expressions, colors, and actions. Wonder out loud. At first, children may just listen, but you will notice that in time they will begin to talk about details that are noticed in books or surroundings.

Encourage storytelling. Wordless picture books and picture storybooks provide a wide range of topics that will foster written language development as your children invent humorous, serious, informational, and/or fictitious text in response to the illustrations. As children create their own versions of stories, they use creative thought processes important in most types of writing. Some authors who have created excellent wordless picture books are Mitsumasa Anno, Eric Carle, Tonie de Paola, Ezra Keats, Jan Amerod, and Peter Spair. Picture story book authors include Allen and Janet Ahldberg, Maurice Sendak, Chris Van Allaburg, and Jane Yolen.

Focus on instructional writing. Learning to write clearly, to maintain one's focus, and to sequence events appropriately is facilitated when children write **how-to** passages, in which they instruct others by words. Children will write best about things they know, perhaps something they have just learned or at which they are quite proficient. They may choose something as simple as how to open a refrigerator door or how to jump rope. A more complicated piece might be how to carve a pumpkin or learn to play chess. Before beginning to write an instructional piece, have your children make a list of all the things they know how to do.

Write something every day. Provide your child with a notebook to further their writing development by jotting down details you have discussed as well as his/her own ideas. Many good writers keep journals or they carry small notebooks in which to write dialogue, facts, and daily observations. Writing in a journal provides excellent writing practice and serves as an outlet for venting feelings. Encourage your children to write about things that happen at home or at school, people they like or dislike, earliest memories, or things they want to do. If your children want to share the journals with you, read entries and talk about them, but be careful not to invade their privacy.

You can also keep your children interested in communication by having them send messages, keep records, express feelings, or relay information. Have your children help you with letters, even such routine ones as ordering items from an advertisement or writing a letter of complaint to a business. This helps them see firsthand that writing is important and useful to adults.

You can also use games to practice writing, increase vocabulary, and help your children become fluent in a particular language. Remember that increasing children's vocabulary builds confidence in themselves and their writing ability. Try crossword puzzles, word games, anagrams, and cryptograms designed especially for children.

By **encouraging** observation, **encouraging** storytelling, **focusing** on instructional narrative, and **practicing** writing every day, you can help your children develop writing skills. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

SOCIAL SKILLS/ SELF-ESTEEM

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Young children are naturally generous, loving, and giving. Those who are very altruistic have parents who help them see things from the other person's perspective. Here are some ways to help your children grow into individuals who are sensitive to others.

BEING CONSIDERATE TOWARD OTHERS

Be genuine in expressing your feelings. Follow your instincts when expressing to your children how you feel about negative behavior. For example, when your children hit others, let them know how badly you feel by letting it show in your face and in your concern for the injured party. Let your children hear concern in the tone of your voice as well. Showing your genuine emotions will let your children know it means a lot to you.

Explain consequences of behavior for others. Let your children know that their behavior affects others. For example, explain that stealing is not good because other people work hard for their things and value them. Give an example from your child's own life, "How would you feel if somebody took your favorite video game?" Extend your explanation to stores, if appropriate, explaining that stealing hurts the people who work in the store as well as the people who shop at the store. Focus the discussions to help teach your children why caring is important.

Express different viewpoints. Many children have a difficult time looking at things from another person's perspective. For example, they cannot understand that another might be hurt when they themselves feel fine. You can help them develop an alternative perspective through every day conversation. For instance, talking about a person who is using a cane and asking, "How do you think it feels to walk with a cane?" This type of example can be used to help children think about viewpoints other than their own.

Practice what you preach. Modeling caring and compassion is the best way to teach your children to be caring individuals. The more frequently your children see you acting positively, the better. This includes simple day-to-day acts of kindness toward others in the family, helping out neighbors, or saying "excuse me" in crowds. Reading stories and watching movies about people who devote their lives to serve others are also helpful ways to illustrate the importance of caring and being positive toward others. Read or watch the movie with your children and talk about it after it has ended.

Reward acts of caring with recognition. Look for opportunities to catch your child acting positively towards others and comment on it. For example, you might say, "It was nice of you to share your candy with Jonathan," rather than letting the positive behavior go unnoticed. Recognizing acts of caring can be more difficult than catching children being antisocial, but it is so much more effective.

Look for positive behaviors to praise in your children's friends. The more often your children see examples of caring in their friends and in other families, the more likely that they will demonstrate caring—it is contagious.

By **expressing** your feelings, **explaining** consequences, **representing** different views, and **practicing** and **rewarding** positive behaviors, you can help your children become more positive toward others. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

BUILDING CONFIDENCE

Effective communication is a fundamental tool you should use to help build children's confidence. Effective communication is an integral part of our day-to-day experiences. By openly communicating with your children you not only help them feel valuable, but also help them develop similar skills to use in their interaction with others.

We all feel better about ourselves when we can express our feelings and be understood. Children need to know that their thoughts and feelings are worthwhile. Here are some ways to use communication to develop your child's self-confidence.

Be a helpful and active listener. When parents actively listen, they reflect back what they have heard. This shows that they care about what children have to say and that they have understood them. Reflecting back what they have said gives children a chance to correct parents if they have been misunderstood. It also provide plenty of opportunities for giving positive reinforcement to promote and encourage improvement.

Pay attention. When having a conversation with your children, pay attention without interrupting until they have finished. Consider actually asking permission to have the floor instead of assuming your children have finished. While your children are talking, let them know you are listening by nodding, or providing verbal cues (e.g., "uh-huh"). Ask your children to tell you more. Look for opportunities to provide encouragement and reward positive behavior. For example, "I'd like to hear more about that," is a good way to encourage your children to share the feelings with you. Think of communication with your children as a learning experience. By listening attentively you are teaching your children to be polite and sincere.

Provide stimulation. In addition to praising and listening to children, parents need to provide them with stimulation and a variety of experiences. Activities like reading to your children, having them read to you, and taking them to the zoo, park, and museum, can all help to increase their knowledge and confidence. Even going food shopping can be a fun and stimulating experience. Encourage involvement in activities at school, place of worship, and in the community.

Be a participant. Children develop confidence when their parents are involved in many aspects of their lives. Parents and teachers are the most significant people in children's lives. Success in education is a team effort between home and school.

A way to bolster children's self-confidence is for them to see you at school. Your involvement could include parents' nights, conferences, special events, and when possible, assisting teacher and school efforts. Make it a priority and it will pay off. Being involved lets your children know that they and their endeavors are important to you—a sure boost for morale. Talk to the parent volunteer coordinator at your children's school about how you can get involved.

By be **actively** listening, **paying attention**, **providing** stimulation, and **actively** participating in your children's life experiences, you can help them develop self-confidence in their abilities. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material contributed as part of the Student Learning in Context Project, University of Minnesota, Jim Ysseldyke, Project Director.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

BUILDING SELF-AWARENESS

Self-awareness means gaining knowledge about behaviors, actions, perceptions, perspectives, and images. Encouraging a child's self-awareness is a benchmark of parental success. You can help your child acquire a positive self-image, increase a "can-do attitude," and identify and accept personal strengths and weaknesses by directly dealing with them in a trusting, open family atmosphere. Here are some way you can act positively in developing a healthy self-awareness in your child.

Talk about feelings, desires, and concerns. Look for and find positive statements about school or home activities to share with your child. Schedule nightly talks to discuss feelings, desires, concerns, and problems that you see with your child's behaviors, actions, perspectives, and images. End each day with a summary of your child's positive behaviors from your perspective. Keep a diary of "good things" that you and your child identify.

Encourage self-reinforcement. Spend informal discussions talking about ways your child can self-reinforce and develop an awareness of personal strengths. Tell your child directly about personal strengths you observe in the ways he/she handles problems. Help your child self-reward positive behaviors. Get into the nightly habit of asking your child to list five positive accomplishments he/she had that day and how they rewarded themselves for the accomplishments. Keep charts indicating improvements of behavior over time.

Use a "challenge diary" to identify personal weaknesses. Talk to your child directly about individual weaknesses. Use empathy, positive regard, and warmth during these discussions. Help your child keep a "challenge diary" to turn identified weaknesses to strengths (e.g., "How were you mean to Tommy today?"; "What is one thing you can do to be kind to Tommy tomorrow?"; or "Write in your diary how you can be kinder to Tommy."). Help your child keep track of the effects of any attempts to improve areas of personal weakness.

Focus on the positive. Identify areas of strength and vulnerability in interpersonal relationships. Get to know your child's friends and acquaintances. Find out peers' home addresses and telephone numbers. Invite peers to your home and include friends in family outings. Observe how and why your child interacts with friends. Help your child to analyze the quality of peer interactions by asking questions such as: "What makes you want to spend more time with Bill than Tommy?"; or "Why did you and Bill act that way toward Tommy?"

Help your child accept diversity. Explain people's individual strengths and weaknesses in jargon-free language to your child. Provide reading resources, videos, audiotapes, and materials on diverse countries, cultures, and people as appropriate. Obtain toys and games containing materials with individuals with disabilities, diverse home backgrounds, a variety of cultural lifestyles, and so forth. Explain that accepting diversity helps all people to become more accepting of themselves and others. Discuss with your child how everyone is different from others in some particular way (e.g., eye color, hair, height, likes, and dislikes).

By **talking** about feelings, desires, concerns, and problems, **encouraging** self-monitoring and self-reward, **discovering** and **addressing** personal problems, **identifying** strengths, and **teaching** the value of diversity, your can help your child develop self-awareness. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material prepared by Doris O'Shea of Canon-McMillan School District, Canonsburg, Pennsylvania and Larry O'Shea of Intermediate Unit #1, Coal Center, Pennsylvania.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

Communication is a key to success in school, at home, and in life. It is a skill that is learned at a very young age through interactions with those around us and one that continues to develop as we grow older. Effective communication includes both expressing our own feelings and listening to the feelings of others.

We communicate as many messages through our facial expressions, tone of voice, and body posture, as through the words we use. It is important to attend to both types of communication from children and to recognize the messages you are giving when you communicate with them. Whining, crying, criticizing, demanding, threatening, ridiculing, and "the silent treatment" can all get in the way of good communication. Here are some ways to help you communicate more effectively with your child about home and school experiences.

Pay attention. The first step in effective communication is attention. Gain your child's attention before sending a message and be sure to pay attention when your child is saying something to you. Also, attend to nonverbal messages evident in behavior, action, facial expression, and tone of voice. Remember that you also communicate nonverbally and should pay attention to what you are communicating in return.

Be a good listener. Mutual respect is essential between two people communicating. Allow your child to express feelings openly and honestly without fear of rejection or judgment. Accept what your child is saying even if you disagree. Sometimes just a smile conveys the acceptance they need more than an elaborate verbal message. Demonstrate acceptance through your tone of voice, eye contact, silence, and responding when appropriate.

Be a reflective listener. Listen carefully to what is being said and repeat it back to your child using your own language to show that you heard and understood the message. This type of feedback will help your child pay attention to what is said and communicate more clearly when messages are unclear.

Reserve judgments. Be sensitive and open-minded to what your child is feeling and expressing to you. Try to avoid judging what is said until after you have heard the whole message and have had time to think about it. This helps to keep the lines of communication between you and your child open for the future.

Avoid communication stoppers. Nagging, criticizing, threatening, lecturing, probing, and ridiculing are not very helpful to open communication. Watch for them when interacting with your child and try to minimize them in any conversations.

Keep conversations going. In the course of a day, week, month, or year, you will carry on conversations of many different natures with your child. Some will be simple and others will be more complex. Sometimes you will start the conversation and sometimes your child will. Regardless of who starts a conversation, try to be responsible for keeping it going. Often this means shifting to vocabulary that is appropriate for your child and using conversation boosters (e.g., asking questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer or interjecting opinions and related experiences).

By **paying** attention, **becoming** a good listener, **reserving** judgments, **avoiding** communication stoppers, and **keeping** conversations going, you will help your child communicate more effectively. ▲

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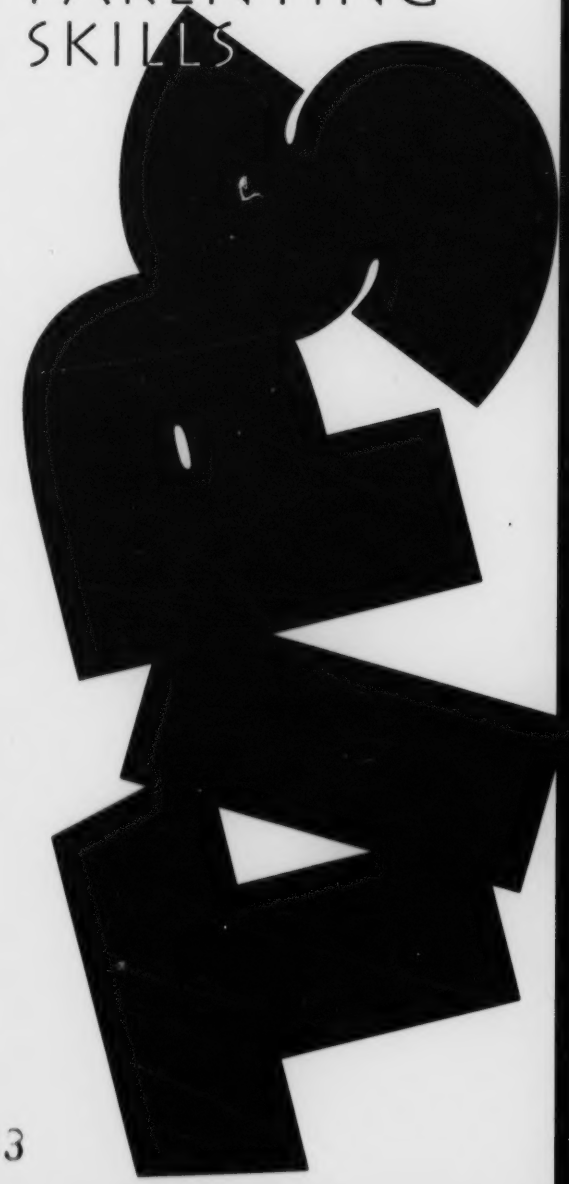

Beginning early in life and continuing throughout school, we are confronted with competitive environments. Parents need to help children see that competition has both advantages and disadvantages.

CONFRONTING COMPETITION

Simple child-created contests should be viewed as typically positive experiences in which rules, skills, and norms are learned without any fear or loss of self-esteem due to failure. They provide opportunities to belong, participate, and have fun. These situations should be encouraged so children can develop positive, healthy relationships with their peers. Yet, competition can also create situations with excessive stress and strain that can result in psychological and physical trauma, or injury and a loss of self-confidence and self-esteem. Sometimes concern for external rewards may discourage children from participating in worthwhile activities. Here are some ways to help your children deal more effectively with competition.

Focus on performance, not perfection. Competitiveness carries a concern for perfection. Your children might think that perfection is the only meaningful goal of performance. Remember, even professional basketball players miss some free throws. Professional baseball players with million dollar contracts often only get a hit three out of ten times at bat. Even the best athlete in the country does not win every game. Help your children focus on trying, learning, growing, and overcoming setbacks rather than only striving for perfection as a result of competition. Praise your children for their effort and skill, not just for the outcome of an activity.

Encourage participation without penalty. Group competition provides an arena in which children can strive to do their best and reach their potential while working together to learn valuable cooperative and interpersonal skills. While it is tempting to force children to participate in these activities, it is generally better to encourage (not force) them to make their own choice, especially if competitive activities have proven too stressful for them. Emphasize the enjoyment of participation rather than the importance of winning and make it clear that participation is voluntary. Allow your children to stop participating without pressure or fear of humiliation. Cooperatively brainstorm ways to deal with competitive situations that have made your children uncomfortable and verbally explore alternatives to quitting an activity.

Focus on achievement of personal goals. Rather than concentrating on winning and self-evaluation as a measure of successful competition, help your children focus on meeting other personal goals. Work toward showing improvement rather than winning or doing everything right.

Minimize failure, but show them how to learn from it. Be sympathetic when competition results in failure, but help your children understand how they can learn from it. Show them that failure is a form of feedback, a way of learning, and a way of helping us do better in the future. Teach them that everybody makes mistakes, but successful people learn from them by applying their new knowledge to each competitive event or lesson.

By **focusing** on performance rather than perfection, **encouraging** all participation, **stressing** achievement rather than winning, and **working** to minimize failure, you will help your children confront competition more effectively. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material contributed as part of the Student Learning in Context Project, University of Minnesota, Jim Ysseldyke, Project Director.

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CONTROLLING ANGER

Anger is a common childhood behavior. A child might act out when he/she is angry because he/she has not learned other ways of dealing with problems. Another child might withdraw as a way of showing that he/she is angry. Controlling anger helps a child make friends, deal with conflicts effectively, and assert his/her needs in a positive way. Here are some ways to help your child deal with anger in productive, acceptable ways.

Recognize signs of anger. Help your child identify when he/she is becoming angry. For example, when some people are angry their muscles tighten up, their heart beats faster, and their face and neck may feel hot. Discuss signs that are appropriate for your child. Show your child how to use signs of anger as the first step in making a plan to control his/her behavior (e.g., counting to ten slowly and taking a few slow, deep breaths).

Emphasize importance of expressing feelings. Sometimes telling others when you are angry is a valuable way of dealing with it. It is usually best to do this either **before** an outburst of anger (e.g., what you are doing is making me angry) or **after** an outburst when everyone has calmed down and identified reasons for the problem. When talking about anger, encourage your child to use words that express feelings without being accusing or sarcastic (e.g., "I felt angry when I missed the game," as opposed to "It is your fault I was late for the game, you never call me on time.") Show them how accusations and sarcasm put the other person on the defensive and block effective communication.

Discuss loss of control in positive ways. The best laid plans sometimes go wrong and even the best students sometimes forget the lessons. At times, a child might lose control before he/she has had a chance to put his/her skills into action. If this happens, wait until your child has had time to calm down and then talk about what could have been done to prevent the situation from getting out of hand. Remind your child that it is acceptable to make mistakes as long as he/she learns from them.

Model appropriate behavior. One of the best ways for a child to learn appropriate behavior is through seeing others perform them. Role play situations that make you angry and show your child acceptable and unacceptable ways to deal with them. Demonstrate how to talk through situations that provoke angry responses. Help your child keep track of progress being made in dealing with anger.

Accept anger and expect it to change. Help your child to see that feeling mad from time to time is okay. Show them that people are usually angry for a reason and that anger usually passes when things that make us angry have changed. Discuss situations and things that make your child angry and identify ways to avoid or deal with them.

By **looking** for anger signs, **encouraging** expression of feelings, **discussing** loss of control in positive ways, **modeling** appropriate behavior, and **expecting** change, you can help your child deal with anger more effectively. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

DEALING WITH ANXIETY

Anxiety, apprehension, or concern are natural reactions for a child when they are dealing with unknown or new situations. Your child may experience anxiety when he/she is worried about being accepted in school, doing well on school-work, meeting your expectations, and/or dealing with normal concerns such as an impending move, divorce, or special concerns related to the stability of the family and the future.

Concern about many of these aspects of life is perfectly acceptable. When anxiety about them has a negative effect on personal, social, and school functioning, you should provide some assistance to your child. Here are some ways to help your child deal with anxiety in productive, acceptable ways.

Listen to your child. Anxiety sometimes increases when a child has to internalize his/her fears, or when they have no opportunity to talk with someone about things that are bothering him/her. Provide plenty of opportunities for listening to your child and being supportive of what he/she has to say about fears and concerns. Remember that many times children's anxiety can be controlled simply with a welcome smile of understanding and a plan of action to help them work through anxious situations without always needing someone to tell them what to do.

Share ways of dealing with anxiety. Ask your local librarian to help you find books with stories about children who are anxious about home, family, or school situations. Try to find some with problems that are similar to those of your child and some that are different. Discuss the ways in which character(s) in the stories handle their problems.

Keep track of activities and ongoing projects. Work out a schedule for managing daily and weekly activities (including tests and other school projects) and discuss it with your child. Start each day by reviewing the activities that are planned and making changes in the schedule as they are needed. Talk about any problem areas to help your child feel more secure and experience less anxiety from unplanned activities and difficult events.

Look for any signs of anxiety. Complaining about the future, having difficulty concentrating, changing speech patterns, being easily distracted, being impulsive, not attending to school work, having problems sleeping, expressing concerns about fears, breathing rapidly, being nauseous, having headaches, stomachaches, unusual fatigue, and avoiding specific situations are some common signs of anxiety. If your child is not able to live up to your expectations, he/she might also experience a great deal of anxiety in trying to please you. While most symptoms or problems will not be present at the same time, it is a good idea to be aware of any signs that indicate anxiety in your child. Recognizing problems early on is often the best first step in reducing them.

Keep track of progress. Look for opportunities to praise and reward your child for handling anxiety positively. Make a big deal of it when your child deals appropriately with a situation or thing that previously caused him/her to be anxious.

By **listening** to your child, **sharing** ways of dealing with anxiety, **keeping** track of ongoing activities, **looking** for signs of problems, and **keeping** track of improvements, you will help your child handle anxiety in positive ways. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

DEVELOPING DECISION-MAKING SKILLS

Ease in decision making is influenced by one's ability to apply reason to a problem or event. Most children make decisions influenced by their immediate emotions and the feelings and beliefs of others. Skills involved in making wise choices include identifying the problem, considering how solutions will affect those involved, choosing a solution, and deciding later if it was the best choice. One of the most important lessons you can teach your children is that mistakes are necessary to guide future actions. Here are some ways to help your child make thoughtful decisions.

Explore problems. Help your children understand that their feelings are a sign that there may be a problem that needs to be solved. You can help your children become more sensitive to their own (and others') feelings by talking about the wide range of emotions that everyone has that signal a decision needs to be made (e.g., a family zoo trip is jeopardized at the last minute because a party for Uncle Stu has been switched to today. The children are upset at the idea of their trip being canceled. Rather than letting them throw a tantrum or sulk, tell them that their feelings demonstrate that there is a problem to be solved.). Describe the conflict. The details of the situation will help to focus the children's minds so the problem can be solved. Encourage them to tell you what the problem is and what is involved with the decision (e.g., between the trip and the party).

Decide on a goal. Having a goal allows your children to focus their energy on the problem rather than wasting it with anger or frustration. Help your children in deciding what the goal should be. In our example, one goal could be to take the trip without hurting Uncle Stu's feelings.

Seek alternatives. Think of as many solutions and consequences as you can. Work through several alternative ways to reach a goal with related consequences. For example, we could go to the party and take the trip later, or call Uncle Stu and explain that we cannot come today. Talk through the consequences for each solution with your children.

Explore solutions. Let your child choose the best solution. Encourage your children to carefully consider the consequences of all possible solutions, then decide on the best course of action. Use words like choose, decide, and select frequently in everyday examples. From our example: talk with your children about why going to the party and rescheduling the trip is probably the best solution (Uncle Stu's feelings will not be hurt and the trip can still be taken later.).

Run through a dress rehearsal of the consequences of a choice. This step encourages your children to be sensitive to the needs and desires of others. For instance, if the children decided to take their trip instead of going to Uncle Stu's party, encourage them to put themselves in his shoes: "How would you feel if it was your party and people you cared about did not come?"

Try the solution and evaluate its success. If the decision that was agreed upon works, great! If it does not work, encourage your children to find out where the solution went wrong and how mistakes can be avoided in the future. For example, after getting a detention for fighting in school, talk to your children about other ways to resolve problems (e.g., talking, walking away, etc.) and what the consequences of these actions might be.

By **exploring** problems, **deciding** on a goal, **seeking** alternatives, and **exploring** solutions, you can help your children become more adept at decision making. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

Although children at various ages have different definitions and conceptions of friendships, friends play an important role in social development all throughout the school years.

DEVELOPING FRIENDSHIPS

Through their interaction with peers, children learn appropriate ways of behaving in society. They learn important social skills that will help them in future interactions with others. Through friendships, children gain a sense of identity as well as a sense of who they are and what they are capable of.

As children learn to value and appreciate others, they learn that they should be valued and appreciated by others as well. This sense of personal worth builds up children's self-confidence and self-esteem. They begin to develop positive images of themselves. These fundamental interpersonal skills remain important throughout the life span. Here are some ways to help your children successfully build and maintain friendships.

Model positive interactions. Encourage your children to interact favorably by modeling friendly, caring, and cooperative interactions. Your children will see your positive interactions with others and will learn to act similarly. When demonstrating interactions, be sincere and realistic. Your children will know when you are mean or overly sweet to others. When you talk behind your friends' backs or hurt their feelings, your children will learn to do the same. Praise them for showing friendly behaviors such as sharing or thoughtfulness.

Value friendships. Talk to children about the importance of friendships. Make lists to share with them of why you like your friends and why they are important to you. Help children think of ways to make friends or incorporate new children into existing groups. Support friendships by having friends over, celebrating birthdays, or letting children call one another on the phone.

Value diversity. Like adults, children have preferences for different types of people. Let your children choose their own friends, while encouraging positive interactions toward others. Do not always let your children choose the same partners in games or activities. Match children with varying interests and skill levels so that your children will learn to interact with different types of people. Encourage your children's involvement in activities that bring different pairs or groups of children together, who are sharing or cooperating in order to meet a desired goal. We cannot force children to become friends with certain groups, we can only do our best to encourage friendly positive interaction with all.

Pay attention to consequences. Despite our good example, children are not always nice to one another. Teasing and competition are children's ways of testing themselves and their peers as they develop their sense of self. Teach your children to accept the consequences of their actions. Show that actions can cause other children to like or dislike them. Role play experiences that demonstrate how it feels to be popular or unpopular, or how it feels to be teased.

Remind children that others have feelings too, and help them consider the feelings of others as well as their own. You can do this by asking, "How would you feel if someone said/did that to you?" This helps children see other points of view.

By **modeling** positive interactions, **valuing** friendships, **valuing** diversity, and **paying attention** to consequences, you can help your children make friends. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

DEVELOPING SELF-ESTEEM

Perhaps the most important gift parents can give a child is positive feelings about himself/herself. If a child likes himself/herself and feels good about what he/she can do, he/she will be motivated to succeed. Praise is a key skill that parents can use to show a child that he/she is valued, doing a good job, and is worthwhile.

Constructive criticism can also be a positive influence in improving your child's self-esteem. Constructive criticism is a way of developing and teaching new ideas, concepts, and skills. Here are some ways to use constructive criticism to build self-esteem.

Focus on delivery, not just content. When using constructive criticism, how you say something can be as important as what you say. Your goals should be to protect your child's self-esteem and to foster a positive reaction to what is being said. Use words that clearly state the positive behavior you want to encourage and reflect how you truly feel about what your child has done—some specific schoolwork, a particular achievement, a kind act.

Be sincere. A important motto should be, "Do not say it if you do not mean it." If you do not truly believe what you are saying, your child will know. It is probably better not to say anything at all than to say something negative. With a little thought, you can almost always find a way to honestly compliment your child in a positive, constructive way. Also, be careful not to reduce or minimize good constructive criticism by adding a qualifying statement (e.g., "That's a great solution, but you should have known better than to get into this predicament in the first place.").

Use praise with rules. When there are rules, a child needs to know that it is important to follow them. When raising hands for permission to speak is a classroom rule, a teacher praises a child who raises his/her hand and, almost magically, others follow suit. The same thing works at home. When the rule says your child is fined if he/she does not take out the garbage, but he/she pays the fine—at least he/she has paid his fine. It is better to say, "Thanks for paying the fine on time," than nagging about the garbage. Such a response may encourage your child to do the job next time. It also points out that you value compliance and "good behavior."

Offer solutions. Try to stop just pointing out faults and start identifying answers to problems when providing guidance. Criticism becomes constructive when solutions are offered, or help in finding them is provided.

Keep communication open. Just telling your child that a mistake was made does little to improve the impressions the mistake made. When using constructive criticism, first find out what happened, what your child was thinking, and what he/she thinks could be done to improve the situation.

By **focusing** on how comments are made, **being** sincere, **using** praise with rule compliance, **offering** solutions, and **keeping** communication open, you can help to develop your child's self-esteem. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material contributed as part of the Student Learning in Context Project, University of Minnesota, Jim Ysseldyke, Project Director.

DEVELOPING SELF-ESTEEM

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

LEARNING ASSERTIVENESS

Being assertive is a constructive way to solve problems. Children who are assertive are able to stand up for themselves, yet still show respect for others. They are able to handle home, family, and school pressures as well as express their personal feelings in constructive ways. You can help your children learn how to solve problems in an assertive manner. Here are some ways to help your children be more assertive in productive and acceptable ways.

Discuss problems and explore solutions. Discuss situations your children have actually experienced, or invent scenarios to be explored. Talk about at least three ways (e.g., aggressive, passive, and assertive) to react to the problem and what the consequences might be for each of the actions. Provide concrete examples and discuss solutions that might be appropriate under different circumstances. For example, you might say, "Suppose Garner calls you a name. You could hit him (aggressive), you could cry (passive), or your could look him in the eyes and tell him to stop or you will tell a teacher (assertive)."

Next you might discuss the advantages or disadvantages of each action. Finally, you might discuss the simple fact that while assertiveness may not always change **others'** behavior, it will always provide an opportunity to express **their** feelings in a positive way.

Recognize feelings and express them in positive ways. Children who are less assertive often either push their feelings aside as unimportant or express them in negative ways. Help your children to recognize and express their feelings and to bring about constructive actions related to them as part of a lifelong process that should start very early in life. For example, instead of hitting other children when frustrated, your children might say: "It gets me mad when you do that."; "I don't like it when you do that."; or "I won't play with you if you keep doing that."

Teach children to just say no. The ability to confidently refuse is an especially important skill for children approaching adolescence. Help them understand that it is okay to say no without providing any excuses or explanations. Provide some role-playing opportunities for your children to practice disagreeing with controversial and routine requests. Share some of your own experiences with situations in which you had to say no and discuss how you handled them. Ask them to share times they have had to say no to friends, but do not be disappointed if they hesitate to offer much information.

Keep records of problems and solutions. Ask your children to make up a situation in which an assertive response is appropriate. Demonstrate a few ways to handle the situation and have your children rate the likelihood of success for each. Recording problem situations and alternatives for how to deal with them in a diary or journal helps many older children become more assertive. The messages serve as reminders for what can be done and provide a positive resource for planning better ways to handle future problems.

By **discussing** problems and solutions, **expressing** feelings in positive ways, **teaching** how to say no, and **practicing** and **keeping** records of solutions that work, you can help your children become more assertive. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material contributed as part of the Student Learning in Context Project, University of Minnesota, Jim Ysseldyke, Project Director.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

A child may have difficulty dealing with their feelings and emotions. He/she may act on them without considering the consequences of his/her actions, or alternative ways to deal with stressful situations.

LEARNING TO EXPRESS FEELINGS & EMOTIONS

Helping your child learn alternative ways to approach feelings and emotions makes success in school and other life experiences more likely. Here are some ways to help your child appropriately handle feelings and emotions by teaching him/her to watch behavior and talk through difficult emotions when upset.

Recognize signs and causes. Help your child identify physical signs of feeling and emotions and specify what it is in the environment that is upsetting. Use past examples of when you and your children have been upset. For example, you might describe a situation in which some children were teasing a child and he/she became angry. Discuss what that child was probably thinking (e.g., "I hate them."; "They're so mean."; "They make me mad."; or "What's wrong with me?") and how that was reflected in how he/she behaved in the situation.

Teach alternatives. Teach your child ways to control his/her feelings when becoming upset. Taking deep breaths is one way to help your child relax. Counting backwards from 20 can also help, providing time to think about the upsetting situation. Using visual imagery is another way to help control feelings. Encourage your child to imagine scenes he/she finds relaxing. Help to identify a soothing image and use it when a situation causes negative feelings or emotions.

Use verbal/visual reminders. Reminders are statements or signs that can be used to help increase success in dealing with difficult situations. Some statements that can help your child relax are: "I'm not going to let him get to me."; "Try not to take it too seriously."; or "Getting upset won't help." By repeating these statements to himself/herself, your child gains time to cool off in a stressful situation in order to cope with the difficulty more effectively.

Practice solutions. Act out a scene that your child would find upsetting. Talk about the situation by having your child describe thoughts and feelings (recognizing signs and identifying causes). Next, talk about reactions (getting angry) and alternative reactions (using deep breathing, backward counting, pleasant imagery, and/or using reminders). Let your child try the methods. By practicing role playing, you will be helping your child learn alternate ways to deal with feelings when becoming upset.

You can also keep a Hassle Log in which descriptions of stressful situations and ways to deal with them are described. A Hassle Log can be simply a sheet of paper or notebook in which your child can use his/her own words to describe what has happened, how he/she felt, what he/she did about it, and how it all worked out. The log can provide real life material for future role-playing activities with your child and is an excellent method of monitoring how he/she is dealing with emotions and feelings.

By **recognizing** signs and causes, **teaching** alternatives, **using** reminders, and **practicing** solutions, you can help your child as they learn to express their feelings and emotions. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material contributed as part of the Student Learning in Context Project, University of Minnesota, Jim Ysseldyke, Project Director.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

RELATING TO OTHERS

Your child is unique. There is nobody just like him/her anywhere on earth. This uniqueness comes from a combination of inherited characteristics and learned experiences. Your child is also similar to his or her peers in many ways. All children share concerns for approval, satisfaction, and survival. These shared concerns provide a basis for developing a world view that includes others and makes life more satisfying. Here are some ways to help your child understand himself/herself among the context of others.

Talk about development. Discuss personal, social, and emotional development with your child. Point out that needs, desires, and wishes of babies are much different than those of toddlers, preschoolers, elementary, middle, or high school students. Help your children understand that his/her actions have an effect on others. Help your child to see that considering others is a valuable part of growing up. Show that the way he/she treats others will often be a good indicator of the way others will treat him/her.

Talk about conflict. Talk to your child about making choices. Look for opportunities to discuss situations where difficult choices are being made. Role play alternative decisions and discuss the relative benefits and liabilities associated with each. Point out the difference between simple decisions (e.g., how to do something) and those that are more complex (e.g., why do something). Discuss the importance of considering others and taking values into account when confronted with complex decisions, more than with simple ones.

Encourage positive comments. Tell your child the importance of letting others know their feelings. Encourage him/her to openly discuss things they like about a friend. Practice showing interest in others by role playing different greetings. Practice being courteous to others in situations that will likely arise in school. Have your child practice asking for help from friends and other students. Talk about the importance of sharing responsibility and what it means to let someone else take charge. Practice constructive criticism and discuss the importance of considering the other's side in any discussion of value.

Encourage self-inquiry. Whenever a child takes action, he/she draws upon past experiences. Teach your child to recognize that these experiences create opportunities for choices. Help him/her to see that their choices reflect potential for success and failure when dealing with others. Show your child that the key to understanding others is remembering that better choices mean better relationships. Getting along with others, taking actions that consider the rights and feelings of others, and achieving personal goals without hurting others are among the benefits that accrue from careful consideration and self-analysis of purposes and actions.

By **talking** about development and conflict and **encouraging** positive comments and self-inquiry, you can help your child better understand the feeling of others. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material from resources prepared by Region IX Education Service Unit, Wichita Falls, TX.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

Cooperation is a learned behavior. Parents and teachers often spend a considerable amount of time and energy teaching children to cooperate. Sometimes the process leads to frustration. Here are some ways to help you teach your child to cooperate.

TEACHING COOPERATION

Make requests without value judgments. Avoid making emotional requests when asking for cooperation. For example, a statement such as, "There are dirty dishes in the sink that need to be washed," describes what needs to be done without creating negative feelings. Pairing requests with statements suggesting your child is "lazy" or that he/she "never does anything right," usually hinders cooperation. Simple descriptive statements identifying what needs to be done work best.

Specify reasons for cooperation. Describe the reasons and rationale behind your request for cooperation. Tell your child why it is important for him/her to follow through on a request. This information will help your child gain understanding and a sense of responsibility for himself/herself and others. For example, you might say that it is important for toys to be picked up so others do not trip on them and get hurt. This type of information helps to reduce the chances that your child will think that you are only trying to exercise your parental power.

Describe the benefits of cooperating. Let your child know that cooperation is important and why it will make a difference. If you have had a stressful day, tell your child that you need help with chores. Let your child know that you may not be able to meet his/her personal needs unless you receive some help. Your child values your feelings and will learn to be cooperative when he/she sees how it benefits you.

Share a reminder. Notes can serve as effective reminders for your child. The notes should be simple and brief, clearly stating the task that needs to be done. These messages can also be creative or humorous. For example, you might attach a note on the television that says, "I can be turned on after your work is finished and your room is clean. Thanks, see you later!" Notes can be used for almost any situation requiring cooperation and they help a child feel more in control of his/her own behaviors. Using notes also helps your child learn responsibility without constant verbal reminders from you.

Reward your child's efforts. Let your child know that he/she is an important member of the family and that cooperative efforts are valued and appreciated. When your child cooperates, reward him/her with a special treat that you both agree to at an earlier time. The extra attention will provide an incentive for cooperation in the future. Sometimes it takes more than one approach to be effective in engaging a child's cooperation. It may also take some time to learn what is most effective for your child and in which situations certain tactics are most likely to be successful.

By **providing** reasons for cooperating, **showing** the benefits of cooperation, and **rewarding** cooperative behavior, you can teach your child how to better cooperate. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material contributed as part of the Student Learning in Context Project, University of Minnesota, Jim Ysseldyke, Project Director.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

UNDERSTANDING LYING

Telling lies is a common behavior among young children. What defines lying as a problem and a negative behavior is the frequency with which it occurs, and the severity of the consequences. For example, if your child's most common response to a simple question of guilt is a fabricated story that is obviously untrue, there may be a problem.

While excessive lying can destroy trust in a relationship and can become a serious social problem, be careful not to overreact to lying because almost all children tell lies at some time or another. Here are some ways to help your child handle lying.

Ask questions. Start with information from your child about lying. By answering questions, such as the following, you will be better prepared to start organizing a plan for your child: What behaviors does your child define as lying? How often does your child lie? In what situations and how does your child lie? Do others think your child has a problem with lying? What other problems does your child have? What types of role models and cultural influences has your child experienced with regard to honesty?

Use behavioral contracts. Constructing parent-child agreements about behavior can have positive effects. Make formal behavioral agreements with your child concerning lying and related behaviors. By making these contracts together, family members establish a clear outline of responsibilities and consequences. Effective discussion and communication between all family members should occur at these times. This is always a good experience for everyone. Follow through with behavioral contracts and their consequences consistently. This shows that you are concerned and serious about reducing your child's lying.

Teach alternative behaviors. Help your child learn positive social skills that will replace lying and related behaviors. Be a role model to your child. Try to be as honest as you can with your child and in your interactions with others. A child who sees that his/her parents are honest will try to be truthful as well. Coach your child and help him/her gain the necessary social skills for the development and maintenance of good relationships. Rehearse problem situations and alternatives to lying with your child. Teach specific behaviors that can be substituted for lying and discuss what other options are available. Discuss the advantages of honesty. Provide your child with a lot of encouragement and positive feedback. Always remember to praise your child's progress.

Accept lies as necessary evils. Remember that some forms of lying are performed by everyone and cannot really be considered lies. False statements are sometimes motivated by positive reasons, such as not wanting to hurt another's feelings. There are also lies that are not intended as lies, such as when the speaker is not aware that a statement is not true. There is also wishful thinking aloud. A child may state wishes as facts and just need someone to help him/her learn how to express desires or needs.

By **asking** questions, **using** behavioral contracts, **teaching** alternative skills, and **accepting** untruths as necessary evils, you can help your child handle and control lying. ▲

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Some children are naturally more shy than others and tend to be more cautious and timid than their classmates. There are many reasons why your children may be shy. Parents and teachers must recognize and respect a child's right to be shy.

UNDERSTANDING SHYNESS

You must not push shy children into situations without adequate opportunity for them to become confident first.

Often children of limited English proficiency are afraid of failing because they feel the language standards are too high for them. For many of these children, shyness is a natural response in an unfamiliar world. Many children learning a new language are uncomfortable speaking out and drawing attention to themselves in class. These behaviors are in direct conflict with class participation and are sometimes cause for concern among teachers when they are inappropriately viewed as noncompliance.

Many people incorrectly assume that children are less afraid than adults when it comes to making mistakes in a second language. In fact, children tend to be more shy and embarrassed around peers than adults. When singled out to perform in a language that they are in the process of learning, children may be extremely nervous. It is not always safe to assume that just because most children learn a second language quickly, that their discomfort will pass quickly as well.

In addition, some children are more familiar with learning more from peers than from adults. When asked to speak in the presence of adults, your children may be quiet and offer little interaction. Also, each child learns differently; some learn by listening and watching, others by participating and talking.

Parents who are concerned about their children's shyness should be observant and attempt to assess what it is in their background that might cause such behavior. Shyness and caution about approaching new activities, unwillingness to do things, timidity, and fearfulness, all require understanding and guidance. For many children, discomfort associated with shyness is very real and adults who make fun of it only make matters worse.

Often it is impossible or very difficult for shy children to tell an adult exactly why they are shy or afraid. Careful observation and patience on the part of the parent can help in understanding. Encourage your children to initiate conversations with their friends as a way to overcome shyness.

Sometimes anxious feelings in the parents may be carried over to the children. Even when you think you are being careful to conceal your own fears, your children may be sensing them. For example, if you are afraid to speak English in the stores, your children may sense it and react similarly when faced with a comparable school experience.

Shyness can be an unpleasant experience. Over time, many children overcome their shyness and learn to enjoy social interactions. Parents play an important role in making this happen by **building** self-confidence and **helping** children interact in socially acceptable ways. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

DISCIPLINE/ MOTIVATION

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

By directly communicating expectations and enforcing some specific rules related to them, parents help their children to understand the relationship between behavior and consequences. Here are some ways to help your children by making and enforcing rules.

ABIDING BY RULES

State rules in positive terms. Rules stated positively will provide children with more incentive to behave better. Rules should tell children what they will gain if they act appropriately; not what they will lose if they do not comply. For example, "After taking out the garbage, you may go ride your bike," is better than "You may not ride your bike if you do not take out the garbage." Also try to make rules short and to the point. For example, "Dishes before TV," is a simple but sufficient rule for communicating an expectation. Both "Dishes before TV," and "After taking out the garbage, you may ride your bike," are rules that specify a desired behavior and a positive consequence for demonstrating the behavior.

Create enforceable rules. If a rule is stated in specific terms, it will be easy to see whether the rule was followed. A rule such as, "Pick up your room before play," may mean different things to parents and children. The rule should clarify what a "picked up" room would look like (e.g., dirty clothes in a hamper, clean clothes in drawers, toys in toybox). When children are told exactly what is expected of them, they cannot make excuses if they do not comply.

Use realistic consequences. Do not promise rewards that you cannot deliver. This is easier said than done! The only way to learn what is effective with children is by trial and error. As soon as a consequence has proven to be ineffective, it should be modified or a new consequence applied the next time the rule is broken. Consequences are often quite effective if they are logically related to the inappropriate behavior. For example, if children come in past curfew, parents might request that they come home one hour earlier than curfew the next time they go out. (If they were out three hours past curfew, they might be requested to spend an entire Friday night at home.)

Apply rules fairly quickly after the specific behavior. Consequences are more effective when they directly follow behavior, especially for small children. If, for some reason, you are not able to apply consequences immediately, explain that the behavior will be rewarded or punished at a later time. When that time comes, tell your children again why they are being punished. Ask children to state the rule that was broken when they break it. Stating a broken rule serves as a reminder for children. They may be more likely to think of the rule before they act inappropriately the next time.

By **stating** rules in positive terms, **creating** rules that are easy to enforce, and **using** realistic consequences, you can help your children learn to incorporate rules into their life. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

ATHLETIC INVOLVEMENT

Outside the home activities require discipline and as such, tend to involve both children and parents in unusual circumstances. For example, commitment to a community soccer or basketball team requires that children attend practice sessions, acquire the proper team uniform and equipment, and participate regularly in games. In addition, parents need to ensure that their children eat meals regularly, get proper sleep, and keep up with homework and school commitments. Here are some ways you can help your children acquire and maintain the discipline necessary for extracurricular activities.

Support efforts, not just performance. Support all of your children's efforts whether they win or lose. Before each game or practice session, spend time with them discussing the importance of learning how to cooperate with other team members. Limit discussions on competition; downplay the importance of winning as the primary goal of sports involvement.

Reward efforts, improvements, and time. After each practice session or game, praise your children specifically for individual efforts, improvements, and time exerted. Encourage appropriate winning attitudes by helping your children describe personal feelings of accomplishment, effort, and improvements over past performances. After winning or losing, reinforce individual performance with a special treat, such as ice cream or a pizza party. Consider the amount of pressure you exert on your children in terms of effort, improvement, and time.

Help your child maintain the sport's schedule. Discuss with your children the importance of regularly being on time to practice sessions and games. Have them get ready for practices and games at least one half hour prior to leaving. Discuss reliability and commitment to the sport's schedule. Model the importance of reliability by being on time for your own commitments.

Take care of your child's physical needs. Provide your children with a medical check up prior to sports commitments. Discuss with them why it is important to be able to remain mentally and physically sound in sports. Ensure that they eat adequate meals at appropriate times. Prior to workouts, discuss the importance of good nutrition in respect to your children's energy levels and abilities. Allow them adequate rest periods. Consider physical needs and other pressing commitments, such as homework assignments, place of worship attendance, or family involvement.

Encourage your child to practice. Allow your children at least 30 minutes a day to practice the sport at home. As often as possible, practice with them to refine their skills and to demonstrate your recognition of their interests. Allow your children to practice at least every other day with friends and neighborhood peers who also may be team members. Recognize that some children may feel more comfortable practicing with peers than adults. Exchange weekly car pool arrangements with neighbors to demonstrate parental commitment to practice schedules. Encourage children to practice the game mentally as well as physically. Offer verbal praise and support for all practice attempts.

By **supporting** participation not just performance, **helping** maintain a productive recreation schedule, **taking care** of physical needs, and **monitoring** your children's sports practice, you can foster athletic discipline. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

DEVELOPING MOTIVATION

Children who are highly motivated approach learning with a sense of excitement. They are self-starters; they do not need constant reminders to get their work done. When children have motivation, it shows: they want to do things and are eager to learn; they complete schoolwork and household jobs without a lot of complaints; they make plans for the next day and for the next week; and, they say **yes** more than they say **no**. Here are some ways to help your children with motivation.

Model expected behavior. Show your children how you motivate yourself. For example, try talking aloud while you and your child are doing household chores. Talk about how you do not really **want** to do the job, but you **need** to do it, and when you are finished you will reward yourself.

Model respect for learning and the importance of school. Discuss how education can increase the possibilities in their future. Talk about people you and your children know who are motivated in some specific area, or are simply motivated to achieve.

Show that you value learning and productivity by attending school functions. Discuss ideas and opinions about school events at home.

Talk to your children about your work. Whether you work outside the home or in your home, talk to them about what excites you in your work or how you motivate yourself to do something that you do not want to do. You can also share your excitement and interest in your hobby with your children. Encourage children's interests in hobbies and projects as well.

Encourage natural interests. Motivation means being excited about something. When your children say, "This is boring," or "I'm so bored," ask, "What can you do to make the job more interesting?" Remember, not every task in life is exciting all the time. Children need to learn that some things just need to be done. When done, it is helpful to have children choose a more interesting task as a way to recognize their accomplishment.

To stimulate interest, take field trips around town and talk about some of the things you see. If your children show an interest in a particular area, encourage it.

Link school and home activities. Connect hobbies or other interests to school tasks. If, for example, your son or daughter is a sports fan, find stories to read about favorite players or show him/her how to keep score using math skills. Show interest and excitement in your children's work. Talk about how being a student is a very important job and make connections between their schoolwork and outside interests. Ask to see your children's books, papers, and school projects. Show how to make a boring task fun by turning it into a game. Think of ways to make the chore a contest with a prize at the end.

By **modeling** expected behavior, **encouraging** natural interests, and **linking** school and home activities, you can help your children develop motivation. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material contributed as part of the Student Learning in Context Project, University of Minnesota, Jim Ysseldyke, Project Director.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

DEVELOPING RESPONSIBILITY

Responsibility is the dependability that holds people accountable for their actions. Parents expect children to show responsibility for their actions and their words. Children need to learn how to be responsible for many things: homework, bedroom, chores, and personal hygiene. Responsibility requires self-discipline; it means knowing not only **what** to do and **when** to do it, but **why** to do it. Responsible children will exhibit some of the following behaviors: They will perform regular duties without being told each time; they will have specific reasons for their actions; they will not excessively blame others.

Responsible children are capable of making choices among alternatives, can play or work by themselves, and are not afraid to make decisions that are different than those made by others in the group. They honor and respect parental limits without excessive arguing, possess the ability to focus attention on complex tasks (relative to age) for some time without excessive frustration, they will follow through with what they say they will do, and acknowledge mistakes without excessive rationalizing.

There is no magic age or point in development when children suddenly become independent. Responsibility is a learned behavior that children gradually develop through experience and practice. By providing children with opportunities to act responsibly, parents are taking the first step in teaching them what it means to be dependable, reliable, and trustworthy. Here are some ways to help your children learn responsibility.

Model how you want your child to behave. Demand the same from yourself as you do from your children. Avoid double standards. Keep in mind that children who see their parents acting responsibly will learn to do the same. Teach responsibility through involvement. By being involved in children's lives, parents can provide the energy and consistency necessary to encourage responsibility. Parents should communicate their expectations to children clearly and confidently. Expectations should be stated positively so children learn what they **should** do, instead of what they **should not** do.

Let your child experience the natural consequences. If, for example, children are responsible for setting the dinner table, a natural consequence of not setting the table would be that they would not eat with the family. By using natural and logical consequences—where the act and its consequence make relational sense to children—when teaching children responsibility, parents can avoid being caught in power struggles with their children.

Give your child choices or alternatives. Presenting children with choices is the first step in encouraging responsible decision making. Given the opportunity to make choices or decisions on their own, children will learn to shape their environment and will experience the consequences of their behavior.

Practice responsible behavior. Break down tasks into small steps so that children can perform each one well. Provide praise or other rewards when children successfully perform each step. Make clear what standards are going to be used for evaluating performance. Provide evaluations that include feedback. Offer demonstrations so that children can see what they are expected to do. Work with children to solve any problems that arise in the course of doing a job.

By **modeling** appropriate behavior, **using** natural consequences, **giving** your child choices, and **practicing** expected behavior, you can help your children become responsible individuals. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

A parent-child contract is a written agreement between parents and children that both can create and carry out. Contracts are effective in negotiating solutions to a single problem of concern in a family.

DISCOVERING CONTRACTS

Contracts help to increase communication between parents and children while teaching children responsibility. Contracts can be used with children as young as seven or eight. Here are some ways to enact a parent-child contract.

Identify the problem. Contracts should focus on a single issue of concern. The issue should be carefully described by both parties.

Negotiate a solution cooperatively. Problem-solving skills are important for children to learn when teaching responsibility. Pick a time to discuss contracting when both you and your children can be patient and listen to one another.

Write out the agreement. If possible, have your children create the contract. If not, be careful to use language your children easily understand and can read. The contract should clearly state what both parties are consenting to do in order to fulfill the agreement. Emphasis should remain on **mutual responsibility** for the agreement. Consequences and rewards should be decided upon and listed. Include dates for completion or renegotiation if necessary.

Sign and post the contract. If the contract is to be posted on a prominent place, such as the refrigerator, check to see if your children feel comfortable having it displayed to others that enter the house.

Carry out the contract. Offer mutual support and appreciation during the time of the contract, as well as before and after. Parents need to be good role models in giving specific feedback to children regarding their progress in remaining true to the terms of the contract. Suggestions should be mutually generated if any difficulties are encountered.

An example of a contract for a child to keep the class gerbil might be:

I _____(child's name) agree to care for the class gerbil every day from _____ to _____(dates). This includes the duties of changing the cage, feeding, and watering. I also agree to only play with the gerbil when it is inside the cage and will not place the gerbil down outside the cage.

I _____ (parent's name) agree to let (child's name) care for the class gerbil every day from _____ to _____ (dates). I will supply the food and bedding for the gerbil. Every Saturday I will inspect the cage to check and see if the gerbil has been cared for by the terms of the contract and mark one happy face on the contract displayed on _____'s room door. If two weeks pass without happy faces, I have the right to request that the gerbil be sent back to the school.

_____

(child's signature)

_____

(parent's signature)

Carefully **identifying** problems that can be addressed, **negotiating** solutions, **specifying** expected actions and consequences, **signing** and **posting** expectations and commitments, and **carrying out** the terms of an agreement will help develop responsibility and improve communication through contracts. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

ESTABLISHING ROUTINES

Everyone develops his/her own pattern or way of doing things. We go through the same patterns or routines of behavior when we get up in the morning, when we go to bed at night, when we prepare meals, and when we complete everyday chores. We value our routines for the security they provide. We are often glad to resume our routines after they have been disrupted by vacations or visitors. Both children and parents value routines and can also learn a great deal from them. Here are some ways of using routines to help your children.

Value routines. Keep in mind that routines are very reassuring to children. Through routines, children feel secure in knowing and understanding what is consistently expected of them. Routines help children develop responsible behavior and self-confidence. Children are able to see how their own accomplishments help themselves and others. Routines demonstrate a vote of confidence in children. By following routines, children begin to view themselves as competent and useful members of society.

Help your children see that adults also benefit from establishing routines. If good routines are established, parents can look forward to doing less nagging, reminding, and unnecessary helping. Instead, they should see an increase in their children's independence, competence, and self-confidence.

Practice routines. Specific routines can involve bedtime and morning, mealtimes, chores, free time, and homework. Each of these routines may require special attention. There are three basic ways to practice these and all routines: (1) encourage children briefly and, if necessary, insist, (2) move your attention from an incomplete task to the completed task, (3) end the routine with a pleasant consequence, emphasizing and pointing out the positive accomplishment.

Establish a routine. Schedule a specific time each day for doing homework. This will make studying part of your children's daily routines. It is a good idea to schedule a time when you will be available to help, especially if your children are in the early elementary grades. If children do not have homework, they can use this study time to practice, review, or read. By establishing a time for specific activities you will help your children see the benefits of planning and following a routine.

When establishing good routines for children, remember to be aware of age-appropriate expectations, encourage and insist on independence, withdraw nagging attention, and refocus positive attention and reinforcement on the completion of the task.

Consequences must take precedent if the child does not complete the routine as expected. However, children must know what the consequences are before they decide whether to follow the routine. Be careful not to give children a lot of attention when they do **not** do what is expected.

Try to "catch them being good." Yet, if they do not complete an assigned task, any consequences should be given in a matter-of-fact manner. It is important to remember the long range benefits of routines for both you and your children.

Often, when implementing new routines, children's behavior will get worse before it gets better. Do not get discouraged; with perseverance, your child's behavior will improve if you **value**, **practice**, and **establish** routines as part of your family life. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

Initiative means having good ideas, setting goals, and putting them into action. Initiative includes risk taking, creative thinking, and goal-oriented behavior. Initiative means starting projects and following through with them to completion.

GETTING ORGANIZED

Often the best plans are not completed because our organizational skills are not sufficiently developed to support success. Here are some ways to provide opportunities to help your children learn and practice effective goal setting and organizational skills.

Selecting both short- and long-term goals. These goals can range from getting a better grade on the next spelling test, planning a special family meal, playing a new piece on the piano, or taking a family trip to the zoo. Children need encouragement to set goals. Calendars and schedules prominently displayed at home or in the classroom can help children keep track of their daily assignments and long-term goals. Mark the calendar with dates of tests and keep track of when assignments are due. Include special trips and activities, birthdays, and other occasions. Teachers can send home weekly schedules so as to be included on family calendars. By working together, parents and teachers can help children keep track of their goals and assignments in an organized fashion.

Think about achievement. Use creative thinking to brainstorm ways to achieve desired goals. You can help children break down their goals into smaller tasks, then list the steps in their desired sequence. For instance, if your children want to get better grades on upcoming tests, you can work together to think of ways to achieve that goal. Perhaps another goal is to make a special family meal. With help, your children can choose recipes, plan the menu, make a shopping list, and help shop. Listing goals, dividing them into manageable steps, and checking tasks off as they are completed, gives children a sense of accomplishment about their progress. Setting goals and working toward task completion helps children fight the need for instant gratification common in today's world.

Praise accomplishments. Children need to know that you believe in them, are behind their achievements, and support their reaching for goals. Offer to help when they need you, but let them do as much as possible on their own. By working through obstacles, children will gain a sense of accomplishment, confidence in their own abilities, complete small tasks, and ultimately attain their goals.

Encourage persistence. Begin with the hardest, least favorite tasks; then move to easier, more enjoyable ones. This helps build children's attention span and their ability to concentrate over time. For instance, save dessert until all homework is completed. Many parents set homework time for after dinner. TV privileges and fun activities are withheld until homework is completed. Dessert or TV time following homework serves as a reward for persistence and thoroughly completed assignments. If children do not have homework, they can be expected to spend this time on other activities such as reading, reviewing math facts, drawing, or other quiet activities.

By **selecting** goals, **thinking** about achievement, **praising** accomplishments, and **encouraging** persistence, you can help your children develop organizational skills. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

PRAISING POSITIVE BEHAVIOR

Parents and teachers work very hard to change or improve children's behavior to help them become responsible, successful adults. In doing this it may seem logical (and necessary) to respond to inadequate performance by pointing out the behaviors that need improvement. Unfortunately, when responding this way, many parents forget to acknowledge the **positive** behaviors their children demonstrate.

Praising children for their efforts, improvements, and achievements can really help increase desired behaviors. Here are some ways to support your children's behavior through praise.

Catch them doing something right. Whenever possible, ignore children's negative behaviors and make a point to look for something positive. In almost every situation, children demonstrate at least one positive behavior and that one should be praised or encouraged while the others overlooked (unless, of course, children are endangering themselves or others).

Describe more than evaluate. Rather than praising children in general terms, such as "you are a good girl," or "that was great," tell your children exactly what you liked about their performance. For example, after reading stories written by your children, instead of saying "that was a very good story," you might say something like, "I like the way you described the characters. I could really imagine what they were going through." Find words that will give children a new way to look at themselves.

After praising, try to sum up, in a word, what skill or behavior has been demonstrated. For example, your children can show motivation, determination, self-control, thoughtfulness, loyalty, or creativity. Giving children verbal labels for their behavior will help them become aware of their strengths. It will also help them to exhibit these behaviors again in the future.

Focus on the present. When giving praise, it is best to describe the current behavior without making mention of past weaknesses. When children required a lot of time to learn something, it is sufficient to say, "You have worked hard to be able to do that!" Focus the praise on what they have done, but do not be too enthusiastic. If praise is given with too much enthusiasm, children may feel pressure to please their parents in the future. In addition, children may interpret the praise as insincere if it is too enthusiastic.

Accept mistakes but do not encourage them. Be accepting of children's mistakes. No matter how much parents praise appropriate and expected behavior, children will make mistakes. Try to accept those mistakes as part of the learning process. Point out how mistakes can lead to new discoveries.

Accept your own mistakes as well. Parents and teachers serve as very important models for children. If you cope well with failures and show how you learn from them, your children will learn to accept their own mistakes and do better in the future. Appropriate praise can be very helpful in establishing and maintaining positive behaviors. Use appropriate praise for your child's age and level of ability.

By **looking** for good behavior, **describing** positive behavior, **focusing** on present actions, and **accepting** mistakes, you can support your children's behavior with praise. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

PROMOTING INITIATIVE & PERSEVERANCE

Often, parents find themselves thinking about how successful their children would have been in a certain area if they only would have "taken the first step," "taken a chance," or "given it a try." For others, their concern is that children have taken the first step, but have bounced from activity to activity, never sticking with one long enough to get past the initial learning stages. Most parents will agree that initiative and perseverance are crucial characteristics that they want their children to develop. Here are some ways to help your children develop these traits.

Include children in decision making. Going to a movie as a family? Taking a vacation? Redecorating? Planning tonight's menu? If you are really open to suggestions, ask your children what they think; why and how. Make your children active participants as you carry out plans and have them help put plans into action. Let them experience success or defeat. As adults, we daily enact plans; develop them, give them a try, examine the results, rethink, modify, and then come up with new ideas when we toss out those that did not work. These problem solving activities are tools for confidence building.

Analyze success and failure. Spend time discussing the pros and cons of decisions in a nonjudgmental manner. The more children are able to see that mistakes are a natural outcome of being an active problem solver, the more risks they will take later on and the more acceptable criticism will become to them. When dealing with defeat, avoid "should have," or "would have" comments such as: "You should have chosen a movie with a review so we would have known what it was about before going to it."; or "If you would have picked the less expensive shoes, we would have money left over for a shirt, too."

Instead, ask questions that will help your children look back and form their own views of situations. For example: "How do you think we could have found out more about the movie before we saw it?" or "Was there any way, given the money we had, we might have purchased a shirt along with the shoes?"

Praise actions. If children act and meet with criticism and disapproval, chances are they will avoid action in the future; if children act and meet with approval and reinforcement they will be looking forward to future action. Praise your children's decisions whenever possible. If a decision was not appropriate, assure your children that you frequently make mistakes as well. The important thing is learning from them. Children need to view mistakes as positive signs that they are doing the right thing: learning, discovering, and trying the new instead of sticking with what is safe.

Use a family quiet time after dinner to sit down and read or pay bills while your children work on assignments. This gives you a chance to relax, get things accomplished, and also lets you be available to help your children if they need you. Your availability helps show your children that you believe they are important.

Initiative and perseverance are key components of success in most school and life experiences. By **expanding** opportunities for decision-making, **analyzing** successes as well as failures, and **praising** actions, you can help your children develop initiative and perseverance. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

Motivation starts with excitement and enthusiasm; but the crucial question is how to keep that motivation going. There are many people who start out with energy and enthusiasm, but fizzle out and never finish. Here are some ways to keep your children's motivation going strong.

STAYING MOTIVATED

Set goals. Goal setting is important because it gives children something to achieve. Long-term goals are dreams for the future, while short-term goals are a map that shows us how to reach those dreams. Long-term goals may seem far away and unattainable, so children should also set short-term goals that are more realistic. By setting short-term goals, you and your children will have something to strive for that is more immediate.

Achieving short-term goals creates a sense of accomplishment that is very motivating. To help with this process, show your children how to make lists of their assignments. You can show how to break the large assignments (a long-term goal) into small steps (short-term goals). You can also do this with lists of household chores that are broken into smaller jobs to make them easier to complete. As each small task is completed, check it off a list and reward the achievement.

Model goal setting for your child. Set long-term goals with your children. If your children want to buy a toy, help figure out what has to be done to earn the money for the toy (short-term goals). Talk to your children about completing each small step. When you have a job to do, talk about the long-term goal (e.g., cleaning the living room) and the short-term tasks that will help you reach that goal (e.g., dusting, vacuuming). Older children could help parents think of some of the short-term tasks, while younger children will need more guidance.

Reward achievement. Motivation is greatly enhanced when parents recognize and reward their children. It is also important that children learn how to reward themselves. Utilize a reward that is a natural part of the achievement; for instance, being able to watch TV after homework is done. Remember, it is important to give the reward immediately following the desirable behavior. Reward your children with attention and praise.

When using praise, be as specific as possible about the behavior you are praising. **Catch your children achieving.** Stay on the lookout for achievement behavior that you can reward. Try to notice achievement more than you notice failure. Reward small steps that lead to the final goal. Acknowledge and celebrate effort in learning by saying, "I like the way you tried." Teach your children how to reward themselves. Show them how to make a list of possible rewards to give themselves each time a goal is achieved. Teach children how to remember past achievements, and to visualize reaching goals and imagine how good it will feel.

By **setting** goals, **modeling** goal setting, and **rewarding** achievement, you will help your children stay motivated. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

UNDERSTANDING EXPECTATIONS

Expectations are internal voices that speak to us, guide our behavior, and monitor our actions. We all have expectations for how we would like our lives to progress. As adults, we have had many years to formulate expectations for our behavior. We have been given plenty of opportunities to practice the skills needed to meet those expectations, to make adjustments when we do not succeed, and to modify or change our expectations according to new demands or evolving responsibilities.

Sometimes, expectations are undefined, misunderstood, wrongly interpreted, or inconsistently followed. This makes it difficult for others who have to figure out just what it is we want. As parents, we should try to minimize these misunderstandings so our children are better equipped to know of, adhere to, and meet our expectations.

Whether your expectations are for tasks and chores at home, behavior in home and out of home, or performance in and out of school, being able to communicate your expectations will assist your child in being able to understand, follow through, and meet those expectations. Here are some ways to help your child understand and meet your expectations.

State your expectations and consequences clearly. When stating your expectations be specific and spell out **exactly** what you mean. Clearly state ahead of time both what you expect, and what will happen if these expectations are not met. There should be no mystery or guessing game for your child. Do not assume that your child knows what you are thinking. A statement such as, "Get into your room and get all that stuff off the floor," may have different meanings for you and your child. A child hearing this statement may interpret it differently than you expected and the results can lead to misbehavior for your child and disappointment for you. Changing your request around and saying something like, "I want you to go into your room and put your toys in the toybox and the dirty clothes in the bathroom hamper," would more clearly state what you expect your child to do.

Monitor behavior. Keep track of the extent to which your expectations have been met. Checking is a simple way to monitor and make sure your child met your expectations. Checking in on them also provides an opportunity to praise your child's accomplishments and follow through with positive consequences.

Reward compliance. Set up a specific consequence for each behavioral request you expect your child to meet. For example: Whenever anyone spills anything he/she gets a towel and cleans it up; If one child hits their brother or sister, they are sent to their room for five minutes; If toys are not picked up in the evening, they cannot be played with the next day; Children who take their baths without argument can stay up 15 minutes past bedtime. Setting up rules and consequences reduces inconsistency and makes the environment more structured and predictable for the child.

Expectations influence performance. By **stating** expectations and consequences clearly, **monitoring** behavior, and **rewarding** compliance, you will help your child meet your expectations. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

USING LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

Many parents discipline their children using a system of rewards and punishments. They reward their children for good behavior and punish them for bad behavior. An alternative way of teaching discipline to your children is referred to as **natural and logical consequences**. This method lets children realize the effects of their own action or inaction. For example, a natural and logical consequence for children arriving late to dinner would be that they would not get to eat or would have to eat a cold meal. Here are some ways to help your children with discipline using natural and logical consequences.

Know your child. Understand your children's goals, behaviors, and emotions. Before using logical consequences, you must work on improving the relationship between you and your children in order to clearly understand what it is your children want, what they are doing, and what they are feeling. Learn to separate the deed from the doer. Show your children that even though you find their behavior socially unacceptable, you still have respect for them as people. Try to remain calm and rational when explaining the problem you see with their behavior.

Talk less and act more. Sometimes parents lecture so much that children become "parent deaf." When using logical consequences, keep talk to a minimum as you follow through with the action. Be firm and kind at the same time. Your tone of voice indicates your desire to be kind, while your follow through with appropriate action indicates your firmness.

It is best to remain consistent in your actions. Although no one is perfect when it comes to consistency, the more you remain so, the more your children will know what to expect from you and the greater the likelihood is that they will know how to respond appropriately. Refuse to fight or give in. Set limits on your children's behavior and let them decide how they are going to respond. You might, for example, set a rule that your children may go to the movies if they do their chores around the house first. If they do not do their chores, do not let them go to the movies under any circumstances. Leave the room, if necessary, to keep them from fighting or pleading with you.

Apply consequences thoughtfully. Give children choices. Allow your children to pick from a list of choices you provide them. For example, "John, we are trying to watch TV. You can either settle down and watch it with us or leave the room. You decide which you would rather do." Give assurances that there will be opportunities to change the decision later. For example (from above), "I see that you have decided to leave the room. Feel free to come back when you are ready to settle down." Extend the time that must elapse before children can try again. When children repeatedly misbehave, they show that they are still learning to be responsible. For example, "I see that you are still not ready to settle down and you will have to leave the room. You may try again tomorrow night to calmly watch TV with us."

By **knowing** your child, **acting** more than talking, and **applying** consequences thoughtfully, you can help your children better accept discipline. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material contributed as part of the Student Learning in Context Project, University of Minnesota, Jim Ysseldyke, Project Director.

USING LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

USING TIME-OUT

Children often display annoying and disruptive behaviors when attempting to get their way. Such behavior can be so disagreeable that parents may become frustrated and give in to their children's wishes instead of standing firm in their demands. Giving in to children when they misbehave often rewards their bad behavior. **Time-out** (or spending time without rewards or attention) is one way parents can stop rewarding disruptive behaviors effectively without the physical and emotional drain of yelling or punishment. Here are some ways to use time-out more effectively.

Select a target behavior. Time-out should not be used every time your children misbehave. Choose one or two behaviors that you would like to change. Choose problems that occur frequently and that can be observed directly.

Tell children about time-out. Explain that time-out will be used when a certain behavior occurs. Explain that bad behavior has negative effects on other people and thus, cannot be tolerated. Emphasize that you love your children and that you are trying to help them better behave. Choose a place free of stimulation for time-out. Since time-out is supposed to be time away from rewards and attention, it should take place in an area that does not provide either of these. Children in time-out should be away from their toys, TVs and radios, and other people. Do not use a frightening or unsafe place for time-out.

Be consistent. Once the target behavior is chosen, time-out should be used as soon as the behavior is displayed. Be sure to use time-out whenever the target behavior occurs. Giving in just once will greatly decrease the effectiveness of time-out. Children should be placed in the time-out area within about ten seconds after they misbehave. If you forget to use time-out right away, wait until the next time the behavior occurs. Children should not be given a time-out for something they did hours ago.

Be brief. One or two brief sentences is enough to explain to children why they are going to time-out. Simply state the misbehavior and give the command to go to time-out. Arguments and lengthy explanations provide children with extra attention and may decrease the effectiveness of time-out. Children should not be secluded for long periods of time. A good guideline to use is one minute for each year of age. Use a timer to avoid accidentally leaving children in time-out for too long. Remember to ignore children during time-out.

Discuss time-out. Talk with children after time-out. Have them tell you why they were sent to time-out. Children should have a clear understanding of the behavior that led to the punishment. If children do not give the correct reason for going to time-out, explain it to them before letting them go on to their next activity. If children tell you the correct reason, let them go on to something new right away.

By **selecting** an appropriate target behavior, **discussing** time-out procedures, **being** consistent, brief, and positive after time-out experiences, you can discipline your children with time-out. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material contributed as part of the Student Learning in Context Project, University of Minnesota, Jim Ysseldyke, Project Director.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

PERSONAL HEALTH/SAFETY

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ADDRESSING ALCOHOL USE

Children at younger and younger ages are having to make decisions about alcohol and drinking. Alcohol is a powerful substance that effects the brain. Alcohol is a dangerous substance that causes serious health problems and is a major cause of car crashes, boating accidents and drownings, and violent crimes. Most professionals agree that choosing not to drink is the best way to avoid problems associated with alcohol. Here are some ways to help your children deal with alcohol and drinking.

Discuss choices. Not drinking is the best possible way to avoid problems with alcohol; encourage your children to accept this alternative as a way of life. Teach them that if they drink, their problems will be related to how **much** they drink, how **often** they drink, and the **circumstances** under which they drink. The greater the amount people drink, the greater the risk of serious problems. The more frequently people drink, the greater the chance of problems. There are no good reasons for drinking, but using alcohol to relieve stress or to overcome shyness are foremost among wrong reasons for drinking. Show your children that people who choose not to drink enjoy better overall health, save money, avoid legal hassles, and lead safer, healthier lives.

Discuss effects. Talk to your children about the effects of drinking. Stress the importance of knowing that even small amounts of alcohol (e.g., one or two drinks) can change the way a person thinks, acts, or feels. Let them know that drinking often intensifies feelings of anger, jealously, and depression. It also causes people to loose their ability to think clearly and sometimes results in a loss of coordination that can be very dangerous. Discuss the way alcohol causes some people to act impulsively and as a result, cause harm to themselves and others. Let your children know that excessive drinking can cause serious health problems for their heart, liver, and digestive tract.

Discuss facts and fiction. Help your children to distinguish between the facts related to alcohol and the myths sometimes supported by their peers. For instance:

Myth: People who are emotionally healthy are not at risk for problems with alcohol.

Fact: Anybody can have a drinking problem.

Myth: People who are depressed have problems with alcohol.

Fact: Alcohol is a depressant and, for some people, drinking alcohol causes depression.

Myth: Drinking is the way to have a good time.

Fact: Drinking does not guarantee a good time. For many people, drinking causes bad feelings and leads to legal problems and problems with family and friends.

Myth: Drinking helps a person overcome shyness.

Fact: If you are not drinking, you are more likely to demonstrate appropriate social skills (e.g., listening, conversing, and understanding the feelings of others).

By **discussing** choices related to alcohol, **discussing** the effects of drinking, and **discussing** the facts and fictions related to drinking, you can help your children deal with alcohol and problems related to drinking. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material from resources prepared by Region IX Education Service Unit, Wichita Falls, TX.

ADDRESSING ALCOHOL USE

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

CONFRONTING SUICIDE

Suicide is a leading cause of death among young people between the ages of 15 and 24. Each year, about 5,000 suicides are reported for this group, while many more occur that are reported as "accidental deaths." Most professionals agree that a suicide attempt is a cry for help. Learning about suicide can help you answer the cry before it is too late. Here are some ways to recognize warning signs.

Learn about the motivations behind suicide. No one knows for sure why a young person tries to intentionally end his/her life. Clearly the helplessness and hopelessness that are part of the decision are the result of many factors. Depression, family problems, pressure to succeed, poor self-esteem, or a significant loss are possible reasons for thinking about suicide. It is common for young people to experience serious depression that can make everything seem desperate. Family problems, such as divorce or instability, cause many young people to feel that nobody understands them. Getting good grades, being accepted to college, and getting a good job are among pressures to succeed that plague many young people and make them feel overwhelmed. Awkwardness, school failure, and a lack of support are among factors causing low self-esteem that often result in thinking about suicide. Suicide may also be a reaction to the loss of a loved one, moving away from friends, or breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend.

Dispel myths. You and your children need to become aware of and actively discuss the **facts** and **myths** related to suicide. For instance:

Myth: A person who threatens suicide will not really do it.

Fact: People who commit suicide often talk about it before they try to do it.

Myth: Only insane people commit suicide.

Fact: People who feel hopeless and depressed are more likely to commit suicide, but they are often not out of touch with reality.

Myth: Talking about suicide might cause a person to do it.

Fact: Discussing problems related to suicide shows you care and this is more helpful than harmful.

Myth: Once a person decides to commit suicide, nothing can stop him/her.

Fact: Most people want to be stopped from taking their lives; they are often searching for care and concern.

Recognize danger signs. Be alert to the signals a person considering suicide may send out. Verbal threats, taking unusual risks, substance abuse, giving away possessions, problems at school, themes of death in writing or other expressions, and sudden, unexpected happiness are among danger signs for people considering suicide.

Have a plan. A person considering suicide needs to know that others care and are concerned. Be direct in talking to your children about suicide (e.g., Are you considering suicide? Will you talk to someone who can help?). Be a good listener, and avoid making moral judgments or arguing. Do not take warning signs lightly. **Seek outside help immediately** (local Department of Mental Health, Suicide Prevention Hotline, family doctor) if you suspect your chid is considering taking their life. **Do not try to solve this on your own. Do not leave your child alone** after a suicide discussion.

By **learning** about suicide, **dispelling** myths, **recognizing** danger signs, and **planning** a support system, you can address suicide with your children. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material contributed as part of the Student Learning in Context Project, University of Minnesota, Jim Ysseldyke, Project Director.

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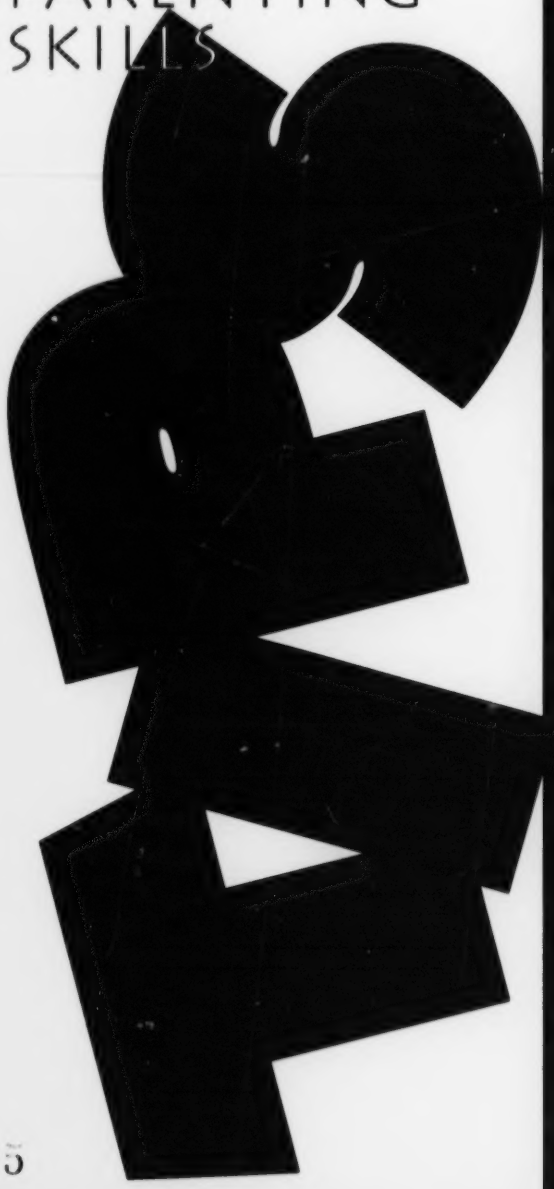

CONFRONTING VIOLENCE AT SCHOOL

School violence is a concern for many parents and their children. Do not be afraid to talk to your child about conflict situations that arise in school. Often the first step in stopping violence and conflict is open dialogue between you, your child, and other school and community leaders. You are not alone in your concern for safety at school. Here are some ways to help your child deal with violence and conflict at school.

Practice conflict resolution. Ask your child to describe situations of conflict that have been observed at school. Role play possible responses. For example, if your child describes an event involving students hitting each other, act out responses that can occur and discuss the relative benefits and potential problems associated with each. Encourage your child to engage in nonviolent responses. Let your child see you handle anger, frustration, anxiety, disappointment, and other reactions to conflict in positive ways. Whenever possible, talk about how you have handled conflict and ask your child for their reactions to what you did. Let your child know that you value his/her opinion. Demonstrate to your child how to express a difference of opinion without attacking others. Teach your child simple negotiation skills such as taking the other's side, agreeing to disagree, and accepting alternative solutions.

Develop clear-cut options. Show your child that you expect conflict to be resolved without verbal or physical escalation. Offer to accompany your child to school to discuss your expectations with teachers and other school personnel. Teach your child that smiles are better than frowns and while peaceful solutions may take more time and effort, they are often more long lasting. Encourage your child to discuss his/her expectations of ways to deal with conflict and violence. Teach your child to discourage violence in others. Teach your child to walk away from group conflict situations that often have powerful contagious effects. Encourage them to handle conflict in private rather than in front of large groups of students.

Develop "street smart" responses. Your child needs to know about potential problems that can occur outside of school as well as those inside. Play "What if" games with your child (e.g., "What if someone you don't know asked you to . . . ? What would you do?"). Listen to your child's response and discuss the appropriateness of it, or explore alternatives that might have a better effect. Have your child memorize a secret code word to ask for if a stranger says they were told to pick him/her up.

Value opinions of others. Professionals in your local school and community share your concern for the safety and well-being of your child. Contact youth leaders, police support groups, church leaders, and school officials for information on ways to control violence and assist children in dealing with its consequences. Organize a neighborhood meeting and have local professionals discuss programs that are working in local neighborhoods, schools, and communities.

By **practicing** conflict resolution, **developing** clear-cut response alternatives, **developing** street smart skills, and **using** local community leaders for support, you can help your child handle school violence and conflict. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material from *A Kid's Guide to How to Stop the Violence* (Avon, 1992) by Ruth Harris Terrell, with resources prepared by Region IX Education Service Unit, Wichita Falls, TX.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

Parents need to take into account the level of development and behavior of their child when providing for his/her safety. It is important to learn about the world your child lives in, inside and outside your home, so as to be aware and keep them safe.

ENSURING SAFETY

Here are some ways to help your family improve safety.

Explore your neighborhood.
Familiarize your child with local places you frequent. Visit local places like markets, doctor's office, gas stations, post offices, libraries, and churches with your child. Trace the route between your home and your child's school. Show your child on a map where he/she lives and help them become familiar with the street names in your neighborhood. Help your child to be aware of his/her surroundings. Teach your child to notice things. Have your child describe different rooms in the house. Teach him/her descriptive terms in order to talk in depth about what he/she observes.

Improve your child's memory.
Go for a walk on your street and have your child recall different things that were seen. Teach your child to remember what he/she has seen by practicing with familiar objects around the house. Use songs or past events as part of your memory training activities. If children are solidly familiar with their neighborhood, surrounding streets, and home information (address, phone number), the risks of becoming lost or other troubling situations are greatly reduced.

Improve your child's ability to listen.
Talk about pictures in a book. Name objects or people in the pictures. Have your child recount them to you. Teach your child to follow oral directions. Give directions such as, "Get me the chair." Eventually increase the number of directions in the command.

Improve safety around the house.
There are many precautions that can be taken in the home to ensure your child's safety:

- Free floor of things that cause tripping.
- Clear away electric cords, toys, and clutter.
- Make sure screen and windows are in good repair.
- Keep garbage area clean and enclosed.
- Check yard for hazards such as broken glass.
- Place decals on glass doors and windows.
- Keep matches, lighters, candles, and other tempting fire hazards locked up and out of reach of your child.
- Keep flammable liquids outdoors.
- Have a fire extinguisher in a convenient location.
- Know how to shut off gas, electricity, and water.
- Store all caustics, poisons, household cleaners, and aerosol sprays in locked cupboards and out of the reach of your child.
- Lock medicines and razor blades out of reach.
- Install safety plugs in all electrical outlets.
- Keep hot foods out of reach.
- Have a first aid kit in a convenient location.
- Check your child's play area for poisonous plants.
- Do not let your child eat any plants.
- Do not leave plastic bags lying around.

By **exploring** your neighborhood, **improving** your child's memory and ability to listen, and **tightening** safety around the house, you can create a safer environment for your entire family. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material from resources prepared by Region IX Education Service Unit, Wichita Falls, TX.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

MAINTAINING HEALTH & SAFETY

Parents can provide children with many opportunities to grow and maintain healthy bodies through home experiences. Skills in learning about the importance of health maintenance, grooming, avoidance of household dangers, and steps in emergency procedures represent areas in which parents can promote healthy independence. Here are some ways to promote your children's self-reliance in health and body maintenance skills.

Keep health care appointments. Encourage children's health and body maintenance by ensuring that children see physicians regularly; model appropriate health care by keeping your own appointments as well. Discuss the importance of health maintenance after each doctor or clinic visit. Monitor children's required shots and vaccinations with a health care official's guidance. Discuss with children that health care maintenance is mandatory in most school attendance policies.

Encourage grooming habits. Setting a scheduled time for bath or shower, arranging hair washings on a systematic schedule, or brushing teeth at regular times throughout the day, often help young children develop patterns of good grooming. Maintain an adequate supply of grooming aids that include shampoo, soap, towels, washcloths, and toothpaste. Talk to children about access to, and the ready availability of individual toothbrushes, combs, hairbrushes, deodorants, personal care products, or makeup. This can help children to view health maintenance as important throughout their lives.

Model good grooming. Children often imitate their parents' grooming habits. Therefore, it is important to set appropriate examples for children. Openly discuss why good grooming is important. Teenage personal care books and magazine are good sources for older children in learning techniques such as proper hair care strategies, acne remedies, make-up tips, and care of teeth and other parts of the body.

Practice household safety. Set aside regular times when you discuss why some household items are dangerous, what they look like, and why these items must be out of the reach of younger children. Show your children where your medicine cabinet is and why medicine must be kept out of a younger child's reach. Point out the purpose of warning signs on detergents, cleansers, and polishes. Use poison signs and danger warnings appropriately throughout your house. Clarify with children the importance of using such signs. Keep hazardous materials in child-proof containers and locked cabinets.

Discuss what may happen in an emergency situation, and what they must do. Teach children telephone procedures in the event of an emergency. Make sure children know about 911 procedures. Review with children where to locate telephone numbers for police, fire, hospital, or other emergency services. Role play fire drill procedures in your home. Discuss procedures to follow in case children are alone or parents are unable to help. For example, prior to bedtime, use scenarios such as: "What would you do if we had a house fire?"; "Who would you call if Dad fell down the steps?"; or "How would you contact the police if Mom were not home and you felt unsafe?"

By **keeping** health care appointments, **encouraging** good grooming habits, **modeling** good grooming, and **practicing** household safety, you can help your children maintain and improve their personal health and safety. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material prepared by Doris O'Shea of Canon-McMillan School District, Canonsburg, Pennsylvania and Larry O'Shea of Intermediate Unit #1, Coal Center, Pennsylvania.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

MANAGING FRUSTRATION

Frustration is a common response to not being able to do what we want. For many children frustration causes calmness to be replaced by nervousness, feeling in control to be replaced by feeling hassled, and feeling refreshed and renewed to be replaced by feeling frazzled and uptight. Some common signs of frustration include nervousness, nail biting, cold hands and feet, tenseness, lack of energy, and physical complaints. Frustration can cause a child to lower his/her impressions of how he/she is doing in school and other life experiences. Here are some ways to help your child manage frustration.

Recognize sources of frustration. Frustration is often created by problems or family crises at home. Even the weather and other environmental problems may cause frustration for a child. For example, when your child is eagerly anticipating a big after-school game in the neighborhood or a special trip, he/she may become very frustrated when weather conditions cause the event to be rescheduled. Be aware of when your child is frustrated and help him/her come to view these setbacks as a manageable part of everyday experiences.

Develop a frustration management program. No matter what specific method you select to help your child deal with stress and frustration, try to follow a few general ideas. First, encourage your child to do something enjoyable everyday and make the activity pleasant and satisfying. Next, be sure your child has some time each day to relax and be alone, away from the pressures of school and outside activities. Finally, constantly monitor the extent to which your child is dealing more positively with frustration and stress.

Practice relaxing with your child. Periodically sit with your child and practice relaxation techniques such as awareness breathing. First, take a break and think about what is causing frustration and stress. Next, relax your arms and shoulders while slowly exhaling through your nose. Finally, take a deep breath and exhale slowly while concentrating on the quiet sound you are making. Hobbies such as cooking, walking, gardening, carpentry, and listening to music can also provide opportunities for you and your child to relax and reduce frustration caused by constantly striving to complete school activities, assignments, or projects.

Practice good habits. Getting enough sleep, managing time wisely, eating right, talking about worries, and taking relaxation breaks are simple ways to help your child manage stress and frustration. Monitor the extent to which these techniques are part of your child's daily life.

Value outside professionals. Techniques such as meditation, biofeedback, hypnosis, and visualization have been very effective in helping young people deal with frustration and stress. Trained professionals in your community can be helpful in teaching these techniques to your child.

By **recognizing** sources of frustration, **developing** a frustration management program, **relaxing** together, and **communicating** with outside professionals, you can help your child manage frustration and stress. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material from resources prepared by Region IX Education Service Unit, Wichita Falls, TX.

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

MANAGING STRESS

Stress is a natural by-product of the pressures of life. As an adult, you may experience stress related to your work, family, or other activities. Your child may experience stress at school as well as in areas related to home life. While a little stress sometimes can be helpful, too much stress can create serious problems for children. Here are some ways to help your child deal with stress at school.

Recognize signs and sources of stress. The signs of stress are easy to recognize. Tightened muscles, quickened breathing, dilating pupils, and a speeding heart rate are physical symptoms commonly associated with stress. Frequent complaints of headaches or stomachaches, nervousness, bedwetting, erratic eating habits, problems sleeping, general laziness, and changes in coordination are additional signs of stress. Help your child recognize physical signs of stress and share them with you. Common causes of stress include problems at home, separation or divorce, new siblings, new stepparents, moving to a new community, death of a family member or friend, and parental problems (e.g., job changes, illness, money trouble). Hospitalization and concerns related to illness or pain, competition resulting from sports or other activities, and changes related to growing up also are common sources of stress. Some of the sources of stress in school are homework, tests, friendships, violence, teacher expectations, and special events. Be aware of stressful situations in your child's life and help him/her accept stress as a natural, manageable part of everyday experiences.

Have a stress management plan. When sources of stress are under your control (e.g., moving), help your child be prepared for them by explaining what will happen and/or discussing the advantages and disadvantages related to the future. Praise your child's efforts to manage stressful situations and look for opportunities to turn stress into a positive learning experience. Encourage your child to see the positive side of situations that cause stress (e.g., "Sports should be **fun**!").

Practice stress management tactics. Practice deep breathing or progressive relaxation with your child as methods for managing stress. For deep breathing, first relax shoulders and arms, then slowly rotate the head left and right a few times before inhaling and exhaling slowly with eyes closed. For progressive relaxation, have your child tighten and release the right arm muscles while making and opening a fist. Next, have him/her tighten the left arm muscles in the same way. Do similar tensing and relaxing for the muscles in the legs, back, chest, shoulders, neck, and face.

Value your child's feelings. Encourage your child to express feelings and listen to what is being said. Accept your child's feelings. Instead of saying, "Do not be nervous about the science test tomorrow," say, "I know how you feel about that test, what can we do to help you do your best?"

Respect your child's right to solve his/her problems alone; do not force the situation. For example, "I understand this is a tough time for you; let me know if I can help."

By **recognizing** sources of stress, **having** a stress management plan, **teaching** your child to manage stress, and **accepting** your child's point of view, you can help him/her deal with stress at school. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

MANAGING YOUR FAMILY'S HEALTH

Today, most Americans enjoy a healthier and longer lifespan than ever imagined before in history. This is true because of the development of new medicines, research, better public health programs, improved medical services and care, and improved health education for children and young adults. Yet, in spite of these advances, millions of people live with substandard health conditions. Modern living has intensified many health problems such as heart disease, obesity, mental illness, AIDS, sexually-transmitted diseases, drug addiction, teenage pregnancy, and alcoholism. Your family's health is critical to success in school, at home, and in life. You can manage your family's health by not only caring for your children but by helping them learn to become the custodian of their body by taking on responsibility for their own well being. Here are some ways to become a healthy family.

Maintain a healthy environment. Dress your children appropriately; be sensitive to your region's climate and dress your child appropriately to protect from extremes of temperatures. Feed your children appropriately; young children eat best when they are hungry, but not famished. Relaxed children are easier to feed than tired children. Small, frequent meals are more easily accepted. Do not feed your children only on demand; set a schedule. Remember small portions for small stomachs. Avoid foods that could cause choking (peanuts, popcorn, raw carrots). Offer only healthful snacks. Be flexible when feeding your children as their growth patterns change. Provide a calm, relaxed atmosphere for eating and always have children sit during meals. Let your children do as much for themselves as possible, including eating. In addition, help your children practice handwashing before eating, after toileting, and after playing.

Know where and how to obtain medical attention. Where is the closest hospital emergency room? What is the telephone number of the poison control center? What health service agencies are in the community? What services do they provide? Are there family counseling services available? Find the answers to these questions and have emergency information easily accessible.

Familiarize your child with medical and dental care. Use stories, picture books, and materials (stethoscope, bandages) to expose children to what going to the doctor or dentist entails. Take children on a tour of the hospital. To prepare them, show them where the doctor's or dentist's office is long before your actual appointment.

Recognize and interpret distress signals. Respond to your children's language. Talk to them about what they hear, see, feel, or do. Help children connect their experiences to language in order to explain how they feel. Talk openly about problems relating to health. Show your children that you are interested in what they are learning about health.

Model a healthy lifestyle. Provide an example that values health and well being. Children learn the most from their family and environment.

By **maintaining** a healthy environment, **knowing** about medical resources, **understanding** distress signals, and **modeling** a healthy lifestyle, you can help your family become healthier. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material prepared by Saundra M. Deltac of Charlotte, North Carolina.

MANAGING YOUR FAMILY'S HEALTH

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

RECOGNIZING LIMITATIONS

Throughout your child's life, he/she will experience pressure, anxiety, and fear to some degree. In small amounts, these conflicts can stimulate growth and learning. Yet, sometimes the pressures and conflicts are too great and children are unable to cope and as a result, their learning suffers. Children are not always able to recognize symptoms that result from stress. You can help your child understand his/her symptoms and recognize the events that cause them. You also want to do whatever you can to help your child cope with pressures in life and to prevent the pressures from becoming insurmountable. Here are some ways to help your child deal with stress.

Let your child know you care. Be available to help your child work out difficulties. When a child has the security of parental love and respect, pressure can be met with self-confidence. Be supportive, not smothering. The more a child feels he/she has solved problems on his/her own, the more assurance he/she feels the next time he/she is confronted with a problem. Be a positive force. Throughout school years, avoid making unrealistic demands. Do not pressure your child to always speak English at home, to always translate or speak for you, or to learn to read before they are ready. Let them feel they are reaching for their own goals, not satisfying your needs.

Teach your child to learn from limitations. School and life in general provide plenty of opportunities for failure. Often individual problems make learning from these experiences more difficult. It is not your child's particular problem(s) that are critical, but his/her attitude toward them. A child should have many opportunities to experience success, but he/she should also meet failure honestly and view it as a learning opportunity.

Praise accomplishments in more than one area. Do not praise a child only for learning school subjects or doing well in sports. Look for success in developing relationships with friends and siblings and in responsibilities at home. Focus on all elements of your child: physical, intellectual, social, and emotional. Spend some time each day reviewing positive activities, events, and performances.

Provide structure and control. A child needs to know what the rules are, then he/she will test them to find their limits. Parents who are firm, consistent, and fair provide an environment that produces less stress than parents who are too harsh or too lenient. Each day, spend some time reviewing your expectations with your child.

Ground your child in a system of values. Even if pressures become overwhelming, you never want your child to seek ethically unacceptable means of dealing with them. You want him/her to be comfortable making decisions and seeking guidance when he/she needs it. Talk to your child about alternative solutions to everyday problems. Stress the importance of understanding the family's values in deciding on a solution to a problem. Help your child identify his/her feelings and connect them to events whenever possible. Ask questions, yet allow your child the space to communicate.

By **letting** your child know you care, **learning** from limitations, **praising** accomplishments, **providing** structure and control, and **grounding** your child in positive values, you can help your child handle stress. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material from resources prepared by Region IX Education Service Unit, Wichita Falls, TX.

RECOGNIZING LIMITATIONS

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

UNDERSTANDING HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Growing children require facts and information about themselves and their changing bodies. Many school systems provide human growth and development coursework starting as young as primary grades. Many parents choose to discuss issues of growing, sexual maturity, and children's changing bodies in the privacy of their own homes; while others choose to supplement information taught in school. Here is some help in discussing growth, development, and maturity with your children.

Start early. You can assist even the youngest children in understanding and accepting growth and development by using correct vocabulary for different parts of the body. For example, parents of toddlers should refer to the body with appropriate terminology (e.g., chest, stomach, legs, thighs) as opposed to slang, so that children do not have to relearn different vocabulary as they age. When possible, help your children associate correctly by preparing brightly colored pictures with the names of body parts and anatomically correct diagrams. Many children also like to play bathtub and dressing games with parents to learn the names of different parts of the body and their functions.

Have books and materials available. You can help elementary-age children by obtaining library books, pamphlets, and videos on expected bodily changes. Reading, viewing, and discussing the materials together can be very helpful in clarifying children's questions and concerns about growth and development. Answering all questions with factual discussions can provide children with support, acceptance, and understanding. You can also model good body image and a favorable outlook on growth and development by discussing your own body with positive statements. Look for television programs that focus on growth and development issues, and watch them with your children as a source of information and discussion.

Play games. Supplement health lessons provided in school by playing games at home. Create a board game using children's own categories and questions to teach youngsters about human growth and development. For example, use "Jeopardy" as a model by having children decide categories (e.g., body parts, body functions, health or safety issues, group dating, leisure activities, and so forth). Write the questions and answers on the front and back of colored index cards. Use a commercial version of the "Jeopardy" game, or make an original using construction paper, plastic, dice, and paper money. Obtain a wooden or cardboard box to display answers. Use colored tape or cellophane paper to hide correct questions in the boxed categories. Players state the correct question based on the answer provided, and earn play money. The player with the most money at the end of two rounds is the winner.

For variation, play "Concentration." Prepare a set of cards with each word relating to health or development on two different index cards. Shuffle the cards and place them face down on a desk. Play by turning the cards over two at a time to find their mates. Encourage social interaction by having two or more family members play together.

By **starting** discussions early in your child's life, **having** books and other information sources available, and **playing** games using information about growth and development, you can help your child learn important lessons about growing up and becoming an adult. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material prepared by Doris O'Shea of Canon-McMillan School District, Canonsburg, Pennsylvania and Larry O'Shea of Intermediate Unit #1, Coal Center, Pennsylvania.

UNDERSTANDING HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

INDEPENDENT LIVING

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ADVOCATING COMMUNITY ACTION

Helping children become aware of neighborhood responsibilities and modeling community involvement prepares them for future civic roles. As parents, you reflect community and neighborhood commitment by your participation and involvement. Here are some ways to help your children learn that being part of a community enhances family interactions.

Become familiar with community offerings. Both you and your child should become familiar about leisure activities, community events, and family-community activities. Visit the local library, call the Chamber of Commerce, or write to community referral programs. Encourage your children to obtain information on new community options and family activities by checking the daily newspaper. Ask professionals to provide community information. Seek out information on local workshops, meetings, reading materials, and so forth. Request that professionals give talks to parents and children about the similarities and differences between families in multicultural neighborhoods. Or raise awareness about children and adults with disabilities. Model question-asking behaviors for children and participate in clarifying children's questions about family and community life. For example, ask professionals, "Where can we obtain information in a variety of forms (e.g., books, materials) to help neighbors and community groups anticipate changes in children's and family's needs over time?"

Model appropriate behavior. Take your children with you to community events so that they can witness parental involvement and commitment. Demonstrate the importance of spending time with other people. Take your children to visit hospitals and retirement homes, with the expressed intent of making other people feel less lonely. Help to organize a sing-along at community centers or through the neighborhood. Plant trees with your children during the school lawn party. Participate as a family in the street cleanup campaign.

Work with and get to know your neighbors. Discuss with your children the importance of neighborhood involvement. Rotate the choice to plan and conduct potlucks with neighbors on your street. Hold a neighborhood street fair with themes such as holiday rodeos, "pigout" desserts, street craft fairs, or sewing bees. Arrange a street parade with other neighbors. Make holiday decorations for local street signs. Hold a community party around a holiday theme. Allow neighborhood friends opportunities to complete projects together.

Support creativity and budding neighborhood friendships by encouraging siblings and neighborhood children to work together on projects. For example, have children write a play or a puppet show to put on at a later date for parents and elderly residents. Older neighbors might help younger ones make the puppets and scenery, write the scripts, send out neighborhood invitations, or charge a small production fee on "opening night." Support children helping children by allowing extra nighttime or after-school rehearsals and helping with costumes and decorations by donating used clothes, unused make-up, or old lamps and tables.

By **learning** about community activities, **modeling** involvement, and **working** with neighbors on projects, you can help your children understand the importance of community ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

COPING WITH SCHOOL TRANSITIONS

Transition has become an educational catch word, often referring to training for adolescents and adults so that they can live and work somewhat independently. Transition really is a lifelong process that includes all changes that families and children experience, starting at birth and continuing throughout life.

School transitions include events like deciding where your children will go to school, changing teachers, moving from one school to another, deciding **what** will be learned and **when**, selecting subject areas, and facing new school roles and responsibilities. For some children, school transfer is a cause of stress, and when combined with other problems makes them especially vulnerable for academic failure and maladjustment. Here are some ways you can help your children reduce the stress associated with transitions and school transfers.

Find out about your child's school changes early. You can help your children make adjustments successfully by planning to address changes beginning months, not days, before changes are made. Prior to your children's entrance into a new program, find a school contact who can explain differences in administrative or school programming procedures. Clarify the new school routines. Make an appointment to speak with the principal or school-family liaison. Ask for written information on new class schedules, the student-teacher ratio in future classes, transportation options, or new school communication methods. Are there future school events requiring pre-enrollment or payments? Are there new school policies related to your children's specific dietary needs, medicine routines, or after-school care? Get answers long before your children enter their new programs.

Be proactive. Initiate the introductions. Help your children orient to school by meeting new personnel and seeing new classes in advance of school enrollment. Visit the future school early. Accompanying your children and assisting with making personal introductions can ease their fear of the unknown. Check to see if the new school has an orientation, tutoring, or "buddy" program for transfer students. If not, encourage the new school to develop these programs and work with teachers and other school personnel to put some in place.

Be up to date on transition issues. As your children move across schools, ask how their current educational programs will change based on their needs. Examine all new records and compare with old records. For example, ask your children's new teachers how past educational goals and objectives relate to their current programs. Are there differences in academic approaches or teacher priorities? Does your children's new school offer the same classroom materials and equipment as last year's school? Do teachers share records across buildings or grade levels? How is information passed on from school to school? Ease in legal matters begins with parents asking school personnel important questions **prior** to the child's school transitions.

By **planning** ahead, **initiating** new school contacts, and **updating** yourself on concerns related to transitions, you can help your children cope with school transitions. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

CULTIVATING DRESSING SKILLS

Dressing habits start early in life. Dressing knowledge and abilities are self-help skills parents can use to the family's advantage. You can encourage your children's growing independence by using dressing skills and clothing choices as rewards for listening, following directions, or making decisions. Self-help dressing skills in the form of clothing selection and care, can help children to expand self-expression as they mature. Decisions about clothing and care can help children to identify with their peers. Additionally, growing independence in dressing skills eases some of the parental burdens of daily household maintenance (e.g., washing and maintaining clothes). Here are some ways to help your children improve self-help and dressing skills.

Provide choices in clothing purchases. Encourage your children to make appropriate clothing decisions. When purchasing school clothing, let your children select at least one item each on shopping trips. Allow your children opportunities to select clothes to wear to play, attend worship services, or shopping. Have your children identify several favorite items of clothing that they wear regularly and why these items feel comfortable. Allow your children to select clothes the night before a special holiday occasion or family affair. Spend the time explaining why certain clothes are appropriate for weather conditions. Allow even young children options in dressing. Lay out two or three clothing choices; or let children decide which color to wear or what item to put on first. You can also offer variety in their routine by allowing choices such as having the option to wash face and hands first, brush teeth next, or get into sleepwear after bedtime stories.

Organize clothing in advance. Encourage children to make clothing selections the night in advance. Children, also, can take their bath or shower before bedtime. Children can pack school bags before retiring for the evening. Include all homework, lunch money, or outerwear necessary for the next day. When parents have children assemble all items before going to bed, children and parents avoid last minute morning panics.

Teach children to launder their own clothing. Parents can encourage self-help skills by modeling for children steps to wash and dry clothing. Provide all family members a laundry basket or space to place soiled clothes. Instruct children to pick up soiled clothes after changing attire. Ask them to hang reusable clothing on coat hangers or closet hooks. Allow young children opportunities to fold clothing with adult supervision. Have young children carry laundered clothing to appropriate bedrooms. Demonstrate to your children the steps involved in operating the washer and dryer. Insist that older children wash, dry, fold, and put away their own laundry. Finally, hold a family party to note accumulated socks in the laundry basket. Put on the kitchen timer to determine which family member can mate the most socks in the least amount of time.

By **providing** choices, **encouraging** selection and organization in advance, and **providing** opportunities for clothing care, you can help your children with self-help and dressing skills. ▲

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CULTIVATING DRESSING SKILLS

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

CULTIVATING HEALTHY EATING HABITS

Self-help skills start early in life. They are skills, such as eating habits, that are basic to most children's development. You can encourage your children's growing independence by using meal and food choices as opportunities for rewarding listening, following directions, or making decisions. When children can make appropriate food selections, contribute to mealtime discussions, or help in family meal preparations, they are on the way to becoming adults. Parents can foster eating habits early by encouraging children's appropriate behaviors. Here are some ways to improve self-help and eating habits.

Provide information. Discuss which foods are nutritious and necessary for development. Encourage appropriate food choices by asking your children to cut out pictures of the basic food groups; display these pictures on the refrigerator. Have your children consider a meal in advance by choosing foods from each of the basic food groups. Discuss with your children how the chosen meal helps them grow in a healthy fashion. Talk about why eating good foods is necessary and what people do to stay healthy. Bring up the topic of how vitamins and minerals add to a healthy diet. Supplement meals with daily vitamins and minerals. Compare prices and the nutritional value of common "fast foods."

Encourage independence. Turn mealtimes into opportunities for children to make their own decisions. Plan theme meals together. Take your children to a favorite restaurant and try to establish a rapport with the owner and some of the staff. Encourage your children to try different specialty foods, but do not force variation. Discuss the characteristics of "good" foods with family members and friends.

Strive for positive mealtimes. Encourage appropriate eating habits by ensuring positive meals. Try to minimize conflicts by making dinner conversations pleasant. Strive for pleasant family conversation by asking members, "What was the best thing you did today?" Use a round robin fashion for conversation exchanges in which all family members can exchange the day's events. Occasionally, allow children to steer family conversations. Also, parents can enhance children's eating habits when they let children determine the amount of food to be eaten during breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Offer a variety of healthy choices but do not insist that children eat foods in a particular order.

Offer your child family meal choices. Let your children have one day a week for the next month to choose a family meal selection or restaurant. Or, ask your child to plan one meal a day for the next week. Encourage siblings to plan and make a breakfast for the whole family that includes at least juice and cereal. Ask older children to cook lunch or dinner on days when parents are working or resting. Provide younger children with the chance to help you make the family dessert for one month.

By **providing** appropriate information about foods and eating, **encouraging** independence about food choices as well as eating habits, **making** meals positive times for discussion and dialogue, and **providing** choice during most meals, you can help your children improve their self-help and eating skills. ▲

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CULTIVATING HEALTHY EATING HABITS

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Children are dependent when they are born, but as they mature, most will become increasingly willing and able to do for themselves. Some children, however, have difficulty becoming independent and sometimes this interferes with their ability to do school work or make friends.

GAINING INDEPENDENCE

There are many reasons why children may become too dependent. Parents may inadvertently encourage dependency in their children by being overprotective and always making decisions for them. Dependency is also encouraged by **doing** things for children rather than **teaching** them how to do things on their own. Behaviors that may indicate dependency are clinging to adults, immaturity, withdrawing, failure orientation, and lack of self-confidence.

There are many options when parents think that their children have dependency problems. Here are some ways to help your children become more independent.

Provide opportunities for independent activity. Give your children many opportunities for successful independent experiences. You may need to start slowly, but the more children experience doing things by themselves, the more willing they will be to try something new. Encourage your children to take part in new experiences and activities with children their own age. Praise and encourage your children for acting independently and try to ignore dependent behaviors such as clinging, whining, and crying.

Provide opportunities for making decisions. If your children are young or inexperienced with decision making, you may need to start with the opportunity to choose between two things such as different breakfast cereals. Praise your children for making decisions independently. Be ready to accept their choices without criticism, no matter how you may feel about the decision. As children become better decision makers, give them the chance to make broader and more important choices.

Try not to solve problems for your children. Unless your children come to you with a problem, do not interfere. Even if they **do** come to you for help, try to help them solve their **own** problem rather than solving it yourself. Even if your children are having a difficult time doing something on their own, give them a chance to struggle. Do not jump in before children have a chance to work it out for themselves. Provide reassurance and reward for actions, not just final products. Let your children know that you believe in them and that you know they can succeed. Try to stop noticing and focusing on mistakes. Even when your children have made a "bad" choice or has not been successful, try to find something positive to say. It is important to talk to your children about how they can do better next time.

Behavior change sometimes takes a long time and may seem to go very slowly, but it is important to remain patient. Be careful not to criticize when dependent behaviors take over for independence. Encourage your children to see the benefits of doing things on their own. Show them how being independent can be helpful.

By **giving** your children opportunities to be independent, **allowing** them to make their own decisions and solve their own problems, you can help them become more independent in the future. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material contributed as part of the Student Learning in Context Project, University of Minnesota, Jim Ysseldyke, Project Director.

GAINING INDEPENDENCE

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

INCREASING SELF-RELIANCE

Increasing independence often means finding ways to promote self-reliance. This entails helping children identify and understand choices, desires, expectations, and needs. You can set the stage for children's growing independence by encouraging children's decision making, problem solving, and self-reflections.

Let children make decisions. Include your children in decision making and openly discuss their choices. Discuss different dimensions of independence (e.g., "What do you call free time?" or "How can Mom and Dad allow you to complete activities on your own?"). Ask children to talk about their interests and observe their individual likes and dislikes. For example, offer choices in family routines, including chore completion, homework time, or time spent playing outside. Let your children decide which toy they will receive as a reward for great report cards or conduct reports. Allow children to choose reinforcers for babysitting, household errands, or other completions of good deeds.

Conduct family conferences. Hold periodic meeting with children on how to make decisions. For instance, ask children to list pros and cons of choices made within the past week. Require them to support their choices. Ask them to consider whether or not completing other acts first may have been a better decision. Discuss why it is important for parents to make the decisions at times (e.g., dangerous situations, cost, time commitment). Always reinforce your children's good decision making.

Pause before solving real problems. When children have problems and ask for input, consider pausing before offering solutions to encourage independent problem solving. Spend time clarifying problem-solving skills. Discuss invented solutions using fairy tales, television shows, or movies (e.g., "Why do you think the three little pigs triumphed over the wolf?" or "How would Michelle from 'Full House' meet new friends?"). Use questions such as: "What happened?"; Who was there?"; "When did the problem occur?"; or "Why do you think the problem happened as it did?"

Do not jump in too quickly to solve real problems. For example, when children have neighborhood disagreements, probe for further information. Clarify statements without offering solutions initially. Use statements such as, "Tell me more what you think or what you believe you can do?" Children may reach acceptable solutions independently. If problems persist, parents can then brainstorm with their children several solutions without revealing a quick solution (e.g., "Other than calling Jerry's mother, how else can you get him to leave you alone at the bus stop?").

Encourage self-evaluations. Ask children to describe at least five activities they believe resulted in positive outcomes today. Discuss five school problems that children might solve differently next time. Help them describe specific ways in which they might improve individual efforts such as: "Spending more time on my homework."; "Being kinder to Jim and Sarah."; "Sharing my candy with sister Rose."; or "Offering to clean Grandma's windows just to be nice." Verbally reinforce children's words. Praise children even further when words and actions match.

By **fostering** and **supporting** your children's decisions, **conducting** family conferences, **providing** time for solutions to problems to emerge, and **encouraging** your children to evaluate problem solutions, you can increase self-reliance and independence. ▲

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INCREASING SELF-RELIANCE

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

Moving from one class to another can cause worry and apprehension in a child. While these changes are inevitable, parents and teachers can work cooperatively to help ease a child's concerns. Your child will benefit and make adjustments easier when you

MAKING CLASS TRANSITIONS

strive to work productively with classroom teachers. You can work with your child's teachers to facilitate classroom changes through awareness, action planning, and collaborations. Here are some ways to help your child make classroom transitions.

Schedule parent-teacher conferences. When children change classrooms, teachers often hold a fall Open House to orient parents. If you need more specific information about changes that your child is experiencing, ask for individual teacher conferences to target necessary information. Focus questions on determining whether the new teacher enforces different classroom rules or has different expectations than previous teachers. Be sure to tell teachers your goals and desires for your child and share important home information that might be useful (e.g., favorite home activities, specific fears, or nighttime routines). Maintain an atmosphere of openness by inquiring about the teacher's background, experience, training, philosophical orientation, heritage, communication style, or personal expectations. Share some personal information about your family with your child's new teacher.

Collaborate with teachers. Parents and teachers who make time for each other learn trust and openness. Discuss with your child's current teacher how you can help in identifying your child's future class needs. For example, you can ask your child's teachers to share information on a future class project, or appropriate tutoring materials useful for next term's reading text or mathematics curriculum. Help, as appropriate, with homework assignments; send notes to school about your child's homework progress. Share home reports with the teacher, have face-to-face contacts, or allow your child's teacher to visit your home. Parents who collaborate with teachers often reduce children's classroom worries.

Be visible. You can also help in class transitions by participating in classroom events. Attend informal classroom meetings, volunteer for class field trips, help to manage classroom parties, or participate in classroom carnivals. Help the teacher by supplying materials for a class entry to the school fair or bazaar. Provide simple craft materials for classroom use: discarded yarn, buttons, magazines, or left over cereal boxes and tissue rolls. Volunteer to share information about your job, or any areas of special interest, with your child's class.

Have children talk to teachers. Parents can ease classroom transitions by discussing with their child the importance of communicating with teachers. Hold nightly mealtime or bedtime discussions about positive student-teacher exchanges. Help your child understand that new teachers are there to help them learn, do their classwork skillfully, and take pleasure in new challenges. Model appropriate participation by talking with school personnel and supporting open communication.

By **scheduling** parent-teacher conferences, **collaborating** with teachers, **being active** in classroom activities, and **encouraging** your child to talk to teachers, you can help make positive classroom transitions. ▲

Edited by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke, with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Original material prepared by Doris O'Shea of Canon-McMillan School District, Canonsburg, Pennsylvania and Larry O'Shea of Intermediate Unit #1, Coal Center, Pennsylvania.

MAKING CLASS TRANSITIONS

SEE ALSO:

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Coping With School Transitions ____ 86
Cultivating Dressing Skills ____ 87
Cultivating Healthy Eating Habits ____ 88
Gaining Independence ____ 89
Increasing Self-Reliance ____ 90
Making Community Transitions ____ 92
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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

MAKING COMMUNITY TRANSITIONS

Transitioning across typical community services occurs during school years or when children are ready to exit school. Most community transitions will entail children moving from school programs to social service or health agencies, while still spending part of their day in school. Community transitions may also mean older children leaving school and participating in adult services such as vocational opportunities or postsecondary trainings. Community transitions become easier when parents and professionals view the benefits of working together in meeting the needs of children. Most professionals are there to help children and parents make transitions successfully. Here are some ways to help your child make community transitions.

Acknowledge community support. Be open to working with your children's community helpers. Parents can help community professionals ease children's adjustments to new personnel, programs, or settings. Parents and professionals can work as a team in planning a smooth transition for children. Parents should have the name, location, phone number, and description of community sources prior to changes in children's or the family's schedules. Ask school and community officials for help in locating local and state resources.

Ask questions. Parents can help children by being informed of all changes to their children's services and requesting updated information concerning education, housing, social services, or health services. For example, parents might ask whether a community transition from a school program to a vocational program entails a change in the student's transportation options. Do new social services mean that children and/or families will receive different economic benefits? Will changing children's primary residence have an impact on future insurance policy claims or social security benefits ? Seeking answers to questions is best prior to making any program or service changes.

Involve the whole family. Hold a family meeting to discuss how family members can make transitions easier. Discuss things like new morning departure and evening return times, transportation differences, or eating arrangements. Discuss roles based on new routines. For example, parents and siblings can discuss how to share new transportation schedules, babysitting chores, household chores, or meal routines.

Recognize transitions are not easy. Community transitions are not always easy and disagreements will arise. Parents can and should speak up about a particular community change as they act in the best interest of their children. For example, when parents disagree with community professionals about a particular child's entrance into a health or social service, parents' concerns regarding the amount and quality of services are paramount. Clarification on who will be providing services, what services are available, how long families can expect involvement, and where help is obtainable are legitimate family issues. Parents are with children longer than most professionals; parent input is a necessity. Parent issues are of importance because they affect children, families, and communities.

By **acknowledging** community support, **asking** questions about community services, **involving** other family members, and **supporting** community, you can help your children make transitions within the community. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

TEACHING MONEY MANAGEMENT

Children learn appropriate money skills by following parents' examples. Family spending and saving habits teach children banking skills that may follow children throughout their lives. You should consider providing economic tips for children even at very young ages. You should also model appropriate and positive money skills, attitudes, and behaviors. Show your children that banking actions reflect money expectations and experiences and that good banking habits often influence a family's future economic awareness and spending habits. Here are some ways to help your children learn money management skills.

Arrange opportunities to develop banking skills. Arrange individual checking and savings accounts for your children at the local bank. Provide a weekly allowance with the stipulation that your children can spend half, but they must put the other half in their checking or savings accounts. Provide opportunities for your children to identify chores they want to do around the house to earn extra money. Let your children decide the proportions of extra money that will be spent and saved. Allow them to help with balancing the family checkbook and making bank deposits. Include your children in discussions related to weekly, monthly, and yearly budgets.

Make earning money fun. Encourage your children's creative sense of earning and saving money. You can help to instill the value of money by providing opportunities for children to be innovative in working for money. For example, support their efforts to distribute newspapers or cut neighbors' lawns. Discuss other local street errand services such as a pet walk and grooming service, a car cleaning service on weekends, or a babysitting service for neighborhood parents.

Encourage children's money making incentives. Challenge children to find creative ways to acquire money. For example, discuss with siblings the possibility of starting a spring pumpkin patch which would result in autumn pumpkin sales. Help children to sell homegrown vegetables in the summer. Discuss the possibilities of selling Christmas trees, holiday wreaths, or winter ornaments and jewelry. Encourage children's participation in group activities such as school candy, cookie, greeting cards, or wrapping paper sales.

Practice with real life problems. Everyday banking and money skills are an excellent source of math practice. Help your children improve math and banking skills by providing opportunities for making change, keeping track of checking or savings account balances, doing comparison shopping, and maintaining a weekly budget.

Instill a sense of community involvement. Model family participation to instill community commitments in your children. For example, discuss with your children the importance of contributing money to charity organizations such as medical research funds, associations for people with disabilities, or community food drives. Have children accompany trips to complete money, food, or clothing drives.

By **arranging** opportunities to develop banking skills, **devising** ways to make earning money fun, **encouraging** money making incentives, **encouraging** practice with real life situations, and **instilling** a sense of community around money, you can help your children learn positive financial habits. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

BILINGUAL/ MULTICULTURAL

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

BECOMING A LITERATE FAMILY

It is important for parents of diverse backgrounds to work hard to foster their children's reading and writing skills. Parents need to show their own appreciation of literacy by demonstrating the need, value, and use of reading and writing for functional and recreational occasions. Working with your children at becoming literate can also improve your own reading and writing skills. Here are some ways to help you and your children become a literate family.

Practice literacy skills. Talk to your children; engage in active conversation. Set aside a time for **just talking** every day. Learn key phrases and expressions and use them in daily routines. Learning how to express oneself is essential before a child can read. Encourage your children to talk by paying attention to their words and ideas. Listen to the radio with your children, or share video cassettes, records, or audiotapes obtained from the library or school. Read often to your children. Your interest in books will model an appreciation for good literature and reading. Read stories, poems, picture dictionaries, dialogues, and folk tales to your children. Have a household of print to read: bulletin boards, greeting cards, newspapers, and songbooks. Read and write letters with your children. Let them dictate a letter to a friend while you write it down. Read letters from friends and family aloud in your native language.

Visit the library often. Enjoy browsing with your children through the books and magazines of the library; attend story hour. Have your children bring books home from the school library. Encourage your children to use their imaginations, experiences, and vocabularies to tell an original story. Tell stories in your own native language; write down these stories in simple terms so your children can illustrate them. Invent new endings to familiar fairy tales. Imagine what would happen if you took a character from one of your native language stories and put them in an American setting. For instance, what would Goldilocks do differently if she was in your native country.

Play learning games. Try to play both active and board games with your children in your native language as well as English. Pick games that require learning directions, guessing, rhyming, and listening. This can help your children become more aware of their surroundings. Point out street signs, posters, and the print environment. Label objects in your home and practice learning the words together. Look for food items with labels in supermarkets. Adorn your refrigerator with examples of your children's writings and art work.

Teach your child how to use resources. Help your children to learn how to answer their own questions by using almanacs, encyclopedias, and dictionaries found in the library, local community center, or your own home.

By **talking**, **listening**, and **reading** to your children, **visiting** the library, **playing** games, and **teaching** your children to use information resources, you can help your family become more literate. ▲

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BECOMING A LITERATE FAMILY

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

COMPREHENDING THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

Many parents, especially those of language minority students, feel that it is inappropriate to interfere with the school's work on behalf of their children. They are intimidated by what they do not know about the school system and leave the task of educating their children to the professionals at the school site. It is important to realize that parents have a responsibility to their children to understand the role of the American school system.

The more active the parent involvement in a son's or daughter's education, the more accountable the school system is. As a taxpayer, you have a personal investment in your children's education. The school's organizational structure is designed to educate your children from preschool through high school. In America, an education affords children career choices. Specific skills for a job are acquired through an education and college attendance is only possible when students have a high school diploma.

Information on the purpose and the mechanics of your children's school is critical to understanding how it works. A local library, or the school itself, should be able to provide information on how much the school has grown in the last 20 years, the number of students it has, and information on its faculty. You should also be able to find out your local school's budget and that of the entire district. How much federal aid do they receive? How much funding do they get for English as a Second Language (ESL) and Bilingual Education programs? How is it spent? How much of the school budget goes to teacher's salaries, curriculum, staff development, facilities? Is your children's school board representative of the school population? Is your culture represented? Does anyone on the school board speak your language? Which neighborhoods are represented? Answers to all these questions have important implications regarding the quality of education your children receive.

There are many other specific questions, that when answered will help you make the most of your children's education. When you know how your children's particular school operates, you will be able to focus more on their learning. The following questions should be answered:

- What are the school's regulations?
- What is their admission process?
- Does the school offer a preschool program?
- Who is the principal?
- What time does school begin?
- Which meals are served at school?
- What is the school calendar?
- What holidays do the children have?
- What days are half session days?
- What procedures should be followed if my children are absent?
- If I have a question who should I contact?
- How should I request a conference with a teacher?
- How can I acquire a translator?

Finally, it is important to know how parents function within your children's school. If you are invited to the school, do not always assume it is to discuss a discipline problem. In most cases your children's school will be open and responsive to parent involvement and parent participation. Communications between parents and the school should be frequent and clear. Teachers and administrators should view your parental role as a strong one in your children's overall success in school. Share your comments and concerns with your children's teachers and administration. Forge a partnership with your school system by becoming informed and involved. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

KNOWING YOUR PARENTAL RIGHTS

As a citizen of the United States, as a member of a local community, and most importantly, as a parent, you are guaranteed certain privileges and rights. The **United States Constitution** guarantees your children the right to a free and equal education. It is important to know your rights and how you and your children can benefit from them.

The Bilingual Education Act (1968) provided funds in the form of grants directly to school districts to finance:

- Resources for educational programs
- Training for teachers and teacher aides
- Development and dissemination of materials
- Parent involvement projects

Due to the Title II of the **Educational Amendments Act** of 1974, school districts are now required to have, regardless of federal or state funding, special programs for limited ability English speaking students (LESA). English as a second language programs were not adequate, so bilingual education was utilized. Bilingual Education is instruction of the Limited English Proficient (LEP) student conducted in both English **and** the student's native language. Additionally, federal rules and regulations required that each grant applicant establish a community advisory committee with at least 50% of its members being parents of LEP students. An amendment in 1978 resulted in the mandate that the native language could only be used as long as necessary for the students to become proficient in English. Local agencies were also required by law to involve parents and community members in the planning and implementation of federally funded bilingual education programs.

As a member of the school community, you have certain rights guaranteed by these laws and legal actions. It is also your right to ask questions, offer suggestions, and participate in school activities. It is the responsibility of not only the school, but the parents and families as well, to govern and advocate what and how children are taught. Education is not something belonging only to teachers, it belongs to you as well.

Parents should be viewed as partners in their children's education. You should have a voice, a forum, and a means of expression. Request that the key communicator at parent-teacher meetings speak your language or ask for an interpreter. Both parents and professional educators should take responsibility and be held mutually accountable for each child's education.

Parents have the right to certain knowledge and information about their children. You not only have the right to equal educational opportunities for your children, but you have the right to know what those opportunities entail. You have the right to examine your children's school records. You have the right to ask any questions you deem appropriate of your children's teachers, counselors, and principals. You have the right to fair treatment in all issues which impact the education of your children. You have the right to ask for explanations about your children's academic development and progress. Finally, you have the right to ask for all this educational information in a language you feel most comfortable with. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

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LEARNING ABOUT SCHOOL RESOURCES

Your children's school is a wonderful place to learn about how you can help children become better learners and how you can be a better parent. Schools often offer a variety of special programs, services, and materials just for parents. Here are some resources that are available in most schools and ways to take advantage of them and be involved.

Parent Training and Educational Workshops. In the context of training workshops, parents are instructed in parenting skills, community relations, and other helpful matters. At these workshops, minority and majority parents and staff from many school systems meet to discuss issues of common concern with cross-cultural understanding.

Bilingual Aides. Parents can train and serve as aides to other parents. Bilingual aides can be a motivational force and link to parental involvement.

Language Resource List. In many schools, there is a list of school personnel who speak other languages. This will be helpful to know for parent-teacher conferences, meetings, phone messages, and other communication concerns.

Parent Support Group. Meetings between parents in similar situations (e.g., those with limited English proficiency) give parents social contact, emotional support, intellectual stimulation, and a sense of fulfillment and self-esteem. Parents can help each other by talking and listening and sharing their experiences and solutions with each other. They can also establish a parent group for English education.

Parent Handbook. A handbook for parents, available at most public schools, contains all kinds of information on the history of the school, how it is organized, and job descriptions. Rules and regulations effecting parents are also included. Information on holidays, school hours, sickness policy, health requirements, and permission slips are provided.

Lending Library. In many schools, materials and books are provided in the designated parent area which suggest how you can, among many other things, help your children develop better study skills or become involved in extracurricular activites.

Telephone Chains. Each team member of a telephone chain will call their previously planned and designated parent to spread school information.

Babysitting Services. Your school may offer babysitting services during scheduled meetings to allow more parents to attend.

Be Involved. Schools offer orientations for parents and families new to the school system. Attend a session to find out what you can expect from the school and community.

Establish a location on school grounds where you can meet and talk to other parents to learn about school resources; it can be a conference room, coffee corner, or lounge. Include a suggestion box where parents can offer ideas to teachers and administrators. Post up to date information about field trips, school regulations, announcements of parent meetings and workshops, daily activities, reports on school meetings and policies, and information on educational opportunities.

Help create and publish a bilingual newsletter and calendar that can be circulated and posted on refrigerators. Make sure all cultural holidays are listed. Fill the newsletter with things that are going on at school. Note achievements and accomplishments of both students and staff. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

Different cultures have their own individual ways of doing things. Identification of such cultural tendencies helps in explaining patterns of thought or behavior that can be confusing to someone from a different cultural environment.

UNDERSTANDING TIME IN AMERICA

Understanding how your child's school views time in comparison to your culture, will help you have a clearer understanding of the school's way of thinking and doing things.

Americans tend to view time as a rapid river that they must run to keep up with; time, as the saying goes, waits for no man (or woman). Other cultures may view time as a slow moving pool, which the population can gradually walk around. Time for Americans is a straight line, a road to the future which they race along. Other cultures may view time as a series of circles, phases that occur over and over, like the seasons. While no concept of time can be deemed more efficient than the other, it is important to understand the "norms" of the society you choose to live in.

Because Americans view time in a linear fashion, they tend to divide up the future into segments. These segments are then planned and scheduled. This is why advance plans and appointments are so important. Many treat time as a material object with its own benefits and values.

By viewing time as a straight line, some people tend to emphasize the future. They believe that if you make use of your time today, it will pay off for you tomorrow. The implication of this belief for your child's academic career is, that what your child does **today** has consequences and benefits for **tomorrow**. Most of your child's lessons, class schedules, and activities are presented in terms of future consequences. For example, if your child does not do his/her homework he/she will not get credit the next day. If your child does not go to bed at a reasonable hour, his/her studies will be effected the next day. Or, if your child does not eat healthy or dress properly, he/she may get sick and not be able to learn well enough to graduate or to get a job.

One of the objectives of the American school system is to prepare your child for life. The term "life" can be interpreted as a child's future life. Schools in the United States are for educating your child so he/she can become a functioning part of American society (i.e., being employed, paying taxes, and voting).

In a technical society, timing is a vital and key component of success. Promptness and punctuality are highly valued in American society. Americans have to learn to be prompt so they can function in the American workplace. It is a good idea that both you and your child have reliable watches; school begins at the same time every day, your child catches the bus because it is on a timed schedule; you get paid because you worked 40 hours a week and were punctual. Awareness of and appropriate response to time is critical in American society. ▲

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TACTICS FOR IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS

USING COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Parents and extended family members of culturally diverse children are often concerned and anxious about their children's overall education when arriving in a new country. Using your community's resources is a way to give your children the advantage. You can develop your own interests and learn viable ways to help your children by knowing your community, what it has to offer, and how you can use its resources.

Know your neighborhood. Draw a map of your neighborhood with your children. Help them to become familiar with the street names. Teach your children about street signs. Discover where the playground or neighborhood park is. Walk or drive around to familiarize your children with their surroundings.

Use your local market. Take your children to the store to identify foods and items you use at home. Find examples of your native language on the shelves. Count cans, weigh fruit, and read labels. Turn a trip to the store into a learning experience.

Visit local companies with your children. Take your children to visit a few of the diverse companies or small businesses in your area. Your children can communicate with other people and be exposed to new procedures. Try to arrange school visits for some of the business owners to share what they do with your children's classes.

Expose your children to different behaviors and places. Children, like adults, are required to act differently depending on where they are. Children should behave differently in a museum, theater, and church than in a grocery store or park. Exposure to different places, coupled with instruction, will teach them appropriate community and social behavior.

Utilize community newspapers. Take photographs of and write news releases on your school's special events. Publicize English programs and school meetings in your native language paper.

Attend conferences. Conferences will enable you to learn more about what is going on in education. You can participate in local, state, and national bilingual conferences and share what you learn with other parents and teachers at your children's school.

Participate in community programs. Schools and parks often offer subsidized camps and learning centers for school children in the summer months. Enroll your children in these activities and try to participate as a volunteer or aide for at least part of the time.

Take advantage of adult education centers. Many communities offer programs that are helpful to parents and speakers with limited English. Does your neighborhood offer an adult ESL program? Do they offer job training courses? Do they provide instruction on parenting skills? You may wish to enroll in an English class at the local community college or high school.

Identify religious leaders that can be helpful and supportive. Leaders at your place of worship can help in getting you involved with school officials. Try to find other parents with similar interests when attending functions at your place of worship, and cooperatively organize group activities.

Prepare a calendar of community events. Circulate a calendar of events which relate to education. Share the calendar with teachers and other families. Help teachers arrange field trips to key cultural events in your community. ▲

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Tactics for Improving Parenting Skills (*TIPS*) was produced by Bob Algozzine and Jim Ysseldyke with assistance from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). We would appreciate your feedback on this resource and will use your comments and suggestions to improve future editions of this product. Please take a few minutes to respond to these questions. Send your responses to our attention at:

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Longmont, CO 80501.

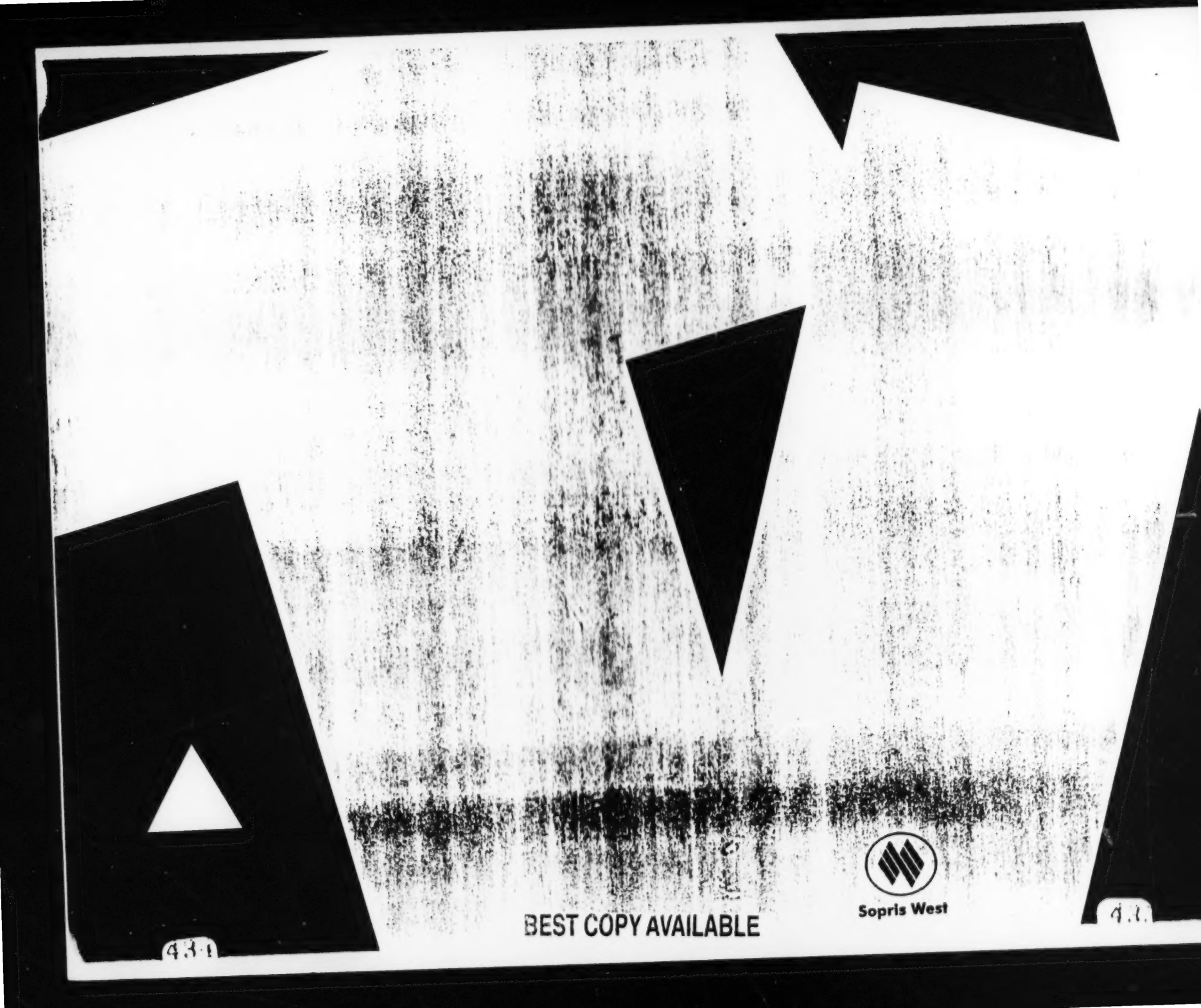
Thank you.

1. Were any tactics particularly useful to you? If so, which ones and why?

2. Were you disappointed by the information provided in any of the tactics? If yes, which one(s) and how can it (they) by improved?

3. What additional areas would you like to see included in future editions of *TIPS*?

4. Any additional comments?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